



Transnationalism

*The Communist International and the National,
Colonial, and Racial Questions*

EDITED BY OLEKSA DRACHEWYCH AND IAN MCKAY

LEFT TRANSNATIONALISM

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Left Transnationalism

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OLEKSA DRACHEWYCH AND IAN MCKAY

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Contents

Acknowledgments ix

Note on Transliteration and Sources xi

Introduction: Left Transnationalism? The Communist International, the National, Colonial, and Racial Questions, and the Strengths and Limitations of the “Moscow Rules”
Paradigm 3
Oleksa Drachewych and Ian McKay

PART ONE ORIENTATIONS

- 1 “Revolutionary Social Democracy” and the Third International 49
Lars T. Lih
- 2 The Russian Revolution, National Self-Determination, and Anti-Imperialism, 1917–1927 73
S.A. Smith
- 3 Origins of the Anti-Imperialist United Front: The Comintern and Asia, 1919–1925 99
John Riddell
- 4 Transnationality in the Soviet Challenge to British India, 1917–1923 125
Alastair Kocho-Williams

PART TWO TRANSNATIONAL PERSONAL
RELATIONSHIPS

- 5 *Los poputchiki: Communist Fellow Travellers, Comintern Radical Networks, and the Forging of a Culture of Modernity in Latin America and the Caribbean* 155
Sandra Pujals
- 6 The Transnational Experience of Some Canadian Communists 183
Andrée Lévesque
- 7 Between the Comintern, the Japanese Communist Party, and the Chinese Communist Party: Nosaka Sanzo's Betrayal Games 204
Xiaofei Tu

PART THREE RACE AND COLONIALISM

- 8 Anti-Colonialism and the Imperial Dynamic in the Anglophone Communist Movements in South Africa, Australia, and Britain 223
Evan Smith
- 9 Race, the Comintern, and Communist Parties in British Dominions, 1920–1943 247
Oleksa Drachewych
- 10 The Comintern and the Question of Race in the South American Andes 270
Marc Becker
- 11 Various Forms of Chineseness in the Origins of Southeast Asian Communism 286
Kankan Xie

PART FOUR NATIONAL QUESTIONS

- 12 “Young” and “Adult” Canadian Communists: The Question of Nationhood and Ethnicity in the 1920s 317
Daria Dyakonova

- 13 "It Is Better to Retreat Now Than Be Crushed Altogether":
Questions of Ethnicity and the Communist Party of Canada
at the Lakehead 337
Michel S. Beaulieu
- 14 Henri Gagnon, Tim Buck, Stanley Ryerson, and the Contested
Legacy of the Comintern on the National Question: The Crisis
of French-Canadian Communism in the 1940s 360
Ian McKay
- 15 Nationalism and Internationalism in Chinese Communist
Networks in the Americas 387
Anna Belogurova
- Conclusion: Future Avenues for the Study of the Comintern
and the National, Colonial, and Racial Questions 407
Oleksa Drachewych
- Contributors 413
- Index 415

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Note on Transliteration and Sources

For sources in alternate languages, this collection follows the Library of Congress transliteration guide when appropriate. For names that have widely used accepted transliterations, such as Trotsky, we have elected to use that spelling, instead of Trot'skii.

For any sources that are based on the Comintern Archives, including copies held outside of the Russian Federation, we have made the effort to use the *fond*, *opis'*, *delo*, and *list* numbers so that interested scholars can find the documents in the Comintern Archives in RGASPI, the INCOMKA Project, or in the copies of Comintern Archival Sources, such as those held at Library and Archives Canada or the Mitchell Library at the State Archive of New South Wales, to name two.

LEFT TRANSNATIONALISM

INTRODUCTION

Left Transnationalism?

The Communist International, the National, Colonial, and Racial Questions, and the Strengths and Limitations of the “Moscow Rules” Paradigm

Oleksa Drachewych and Ian McKay

Capitalist Europe forced the underdeveloped parts of the world into the capitalist maelstrom; socialist Europe will come to help the freed colonies with its technology, organization, and intellectual insight to accelerate the transition to a systematically organized socialist economy.

Colonial slaves of Africa and Asia! The hour of proletarian dictatorship in Europe will also be the hour of your liberation!

Manifesto of the Communist International, March 1919

Well aware that the desire of the nation for political independence can be expressed, under different historical conditions, by the most diverse social forces, the Communist International supports every national-revolutionary movement against imperialism.

Theses on the Eastern Question,
Fourth Congress of the Communist International

Ideals of national liberation and anti-imperialism have long been prominent themes in Marxist thought. And Marxist approaches to imperialism, to nationalism, and to race have influenced many prominent figures in contemporary history. As Erez Manela points out in his lauded study, *The Wilsonian Moment*, after American

president Woodrow Wilson's missed opportunity to champion the self-determination of all nations, many nationalist leaders turned to V.I. Lenin and the Communist International for guidance and support.¹ Prominent nationalist and anti-colonial leaders, including Jawaharlal Nehru, Ho Chi Minh, and Nelson Mandela, were influenced by communist ideals as they pondered ways that they might pursue their own aims. At the same time, historians of international communism tend to be overshadowed by those who work on Soviet imperialism and the excesses of communistic regimes. Doubts have been raised about what a twenty-first-century scholar or leftist might retrieve from the world communist movement. Yet, after the Cold War and the fairly total erosion of Marxist-Leninism – outside of places where it is still theoretically respected if practically disregarded, or such bastions of orthodoxy as North Korea – the impact of the Communist International on national, colonial, and racial questions may be explored in ways that generate less heat and more light. The conventional debates now seem misleadingly cut and dried. In many respects they trivialize the entire subject.

Many have been struck by the glaring contrast between the declarations of Lenin, Stalin, and the Soviet Union on behalf of national self-determination – up to and including the right of secession – and the actions of Soviet leaders, particularly Stalin, including the many purges that appear to have been based on their victims' nationalities.² An ample and easily located literature by left activists, many of them seeking to rescue the legacy of twentieth-century revolutionary socialism from its most influential interpreters, and an equally abundant literature by activists keen on remembering the enormities committed by orthodox communists supposedly in the name of internationalism, testify to the highly contestable nature of this field of study.³

Yet much as critical and realist historical researchers can learn from these works, they will fail in their duties if they do not challenge the limitations of such interpretations – and insist upon a sober and empirically based strategy for investigating the ways in which a set of precepts about nations, colonies, and races were set to work in specific contexts. To reduce the story of international communism to these enormities would ignore the interests, the ideals, and the genuine desires of leftists worldwide as they struggled to sort through the manifold and distinctive national, colonial, and racial questions raised by their specific contexts. Often, leftists sought to coordinate their

responses to these questions in relation to what they perceived to be the position of Moscow.⁴

If one were to presume to lay out an agenda for a coming cohort of scholars examining the Comintern with these questions in mind, one might summarize five useful debates on their horizon:

(1) The prevailing wisdom, enunciated by E.H. Carr in his magisterial and still invaluable study of the Comintern, is that the “Moscow Line” was transmitted from Moscow and received by the communist periphery, very much on the stereotypical “transmission-belt” model; and that the central imperative of the line was, especially after Stalin’s rise to dominance in 1928, the pursuit of the security interests of the Soviet state. No sensible student of the Comintern can discount this interpretation because it is backed up by so much evidence – culminating in Stalin’s peremptory dissolution of the Comintern, without so much as a world congress, in 1943. There is also compelling evidence of the use of the Comintern as an instrument of espionage; the contemptuous and brutal handling of non-Soviet communists resident in Moscow, including the liquidation of the entire Polish party’s executive and most of those of Ukraine and Yugoslavia;⁵ the obvious use of the Comintern as a pawn in the factional warfare within the Bolshevik Party (VKP(b)) that was only decisively resolved in the accelerating purges that commenced in 1934 and reached their bloody climax in 1938 – and so on. The prevailing wisdom is thus, in our judgement, truly a “wisdom.” But it is a partial wisdom. It makes the “Moscow Line” much less contested and much more clear-cut than it often was. It overlooks the substantial agency of central figures in the Comintern itself, who well into the 1930s were able to influence events. It minimizes the extent to which communists on the periphery were, on occasions that were certainly important to them, able to influence the way the line was applied – and even, sometimes, to influence the line itself. It essentializes the transmission-belt model (which undoubtedly characterizes much of the period after 1935) to make it the key to the Comintern’s entire history. It thereby neglects the lively if sometimes brutal but often highly consequential debates that characterized the early congresses. It also overlooks the many agencies other than the illustrious Comintern, such as the Red International of Labor Unions (RILU), where there could be fierce struggles about what the line meant in specific contexts, and where

convinced militants could resist following line changes that did not correspond with their convictions.

(2) The totalitarian transmission-belt model also overlooks the sheer complexity of the Marxist inheritance when it came to nations and nationalism. The people at the top of the pyramid might not have been deeply knowledgeable about the tradition they were seeking to transmit, and honest communists at the base of the pyramid could invoke many conflicting ideas from that same tradition. Although some of these ideas were relegated to obscurity, they remained dormant. To put it baldly: were communists in favour of nationalism or were they against it?⁶ Was it a deviation to attempt to be a nationalist *and* a communist, or to engage so seriously and respectfully with “the nation” that one might rightly be accused of being suspiciously open towards it? The traditional answer focuses, teleologically, on the triumph of an official interpretation of the matter – all roads, in essence, lead to Tehran, Potsdam, and the post-1943 conflation of communism with the hard-headed pursuit of the interests of the Soviet state. But what of the many other ideas and models active in the movement – such as Lenin’s emphasis on self-determination, the Popular Front’s exaltation of supposedly organic folk forms, or the nationalist ideas found in the thought of Tito, Mao, and Ho Chi Minh? To focus exclusively on the “winners” – or at least, those who won in the short term – is to silence a host of important other voices, many of them belonging to men and women who considered themselves loyal servants of the Comintern. On what grounds should we rule them wrong and their enemies right?

(3) What are the implications of the discovery that not all important Comintern influences emanated from Moscow? Could not the “international” – committed to a revolutionary vision of “soldiers” unhesitatingly following the orders of the High Command – also be considered the “transnational” – in which intellectuals and activists developed networks that tied them together with others, without the direct involvement of Moscow, and in which ideas and inspirations flowed over national borders without its central direction? It should be remembered that the history of the Comintern unfolded in a world well before the internet, when even telephone communications could be hit or miss. Moscow was a great distance from most of the world’s communists. The failure of the Chinese Revolution from 1925

to 1927 would reveal the stark limitations of orchestrating an insurrection from thousands of miles away. Under these circumstances, a rank-and-file communist or a subaltern communist leader might attend as closely to the views of other militants facing similar situations as they did to the “Moscow Line,” which was often phrased in a way that could be interpreted according to local conditions. Ronaldo Munck discerningly describes Marxists’ frustration with the “chameleon qualities of nationalism,”⁷ but one might also note the chameleonic qualities of Marxism too. The real meaning of a given Marxist position – for example, on every nation’s “right to secession” – would depend completely on the context within which this position was articulated.⁸

(4) Then what of the top-down elitism of so much writing on the Comintern, which ironically echoes the mechanical themes of the transmission-belt model? Suppose that Moscow did issue a line that permitted no deviations – as was certainly its frequent intention in the later years – and yet many communists either did not receive it properly, failed to grasp all its implications, or disagreed, covertly or overtly, with it. Why should such rank-and-filers be retrospectively drummed out of the ranks? Or why treat as “useful idiots” those who spent time within the communist parties, absorbed many of the teachings of the international, and then sought, often outside the party, to adapt and modify them? Such rank-and-filers do not loom very large in the institutional historiography, but in many contexts – a textbook example being Nicaragua’s Sandino (who broke with the Comintern as a result of its Third Period tactics) – such revolutionaries made a lasting difference.⁹ Useful idiots? Or discerning, critical students, who garnered useful insights from the tradition and found unorthodox ways of realizing them?

(5) And finally, what of the wider cultural and intellectual significance of the Comintern’s teachings on these questions? Historians, both pro- and anti-communist, have a very deep-seated preference for their silos, a tendency strengthened by their occupational hazard of unyielding empiricism. Yet once we go beyond the silos, and in a sense “flip the question” – that is, move from what the communists did to what the wider world made of them and their ideas, as particular takes on “nation” and “colonialism” and “race” found their way into wider discourses and networks – we may end up with a greatly revised

notion of the wider cultural and transnational significance of these often recondite Comintern debates. The Comintern demanded of militants in each country that they rigorously define themselves – and their “nation” – in revolutionary terms. That could, and did, have stultifying and repressive results, as the ensuing essays do not hesitate to show. Yet the very exercise of standing back from one’s own cultural and political background, and giving an account of oneself in the light of a supposedly more universal reason, could have creative and unpredictable results. One need only think of that apostle of armed violence, Nelson Mandela – whose milieu was shaped by Comintern debates about nationalism, colonialism, and race, and yet can hardly be described as anyone’s “useful idiot.”

NOT ONE BUT MANY MARXIST TRADITIONS

It is commonly assumed that Marxists, captives of a unilinear and determinist dogma, were inclined to simplistic notions about nations and nationalism. The truth is more complicated. It is in fact only a slight exaggeration to say, with Nicos Poulantzas, that “there is no Marxist theory of the nation.”¹⁰ There are, rather, many theories.

As Michael Löwy points out, the positions developed by Marx and Engels on the national question were “relatively imprecise.” Marx offered “neither a systematic theory of the national question, a precise definition of the concept of a ‘nation’, nor a general political strategy for the proletariat in this domain”; Engels dallied with Hegel’s doctrine of “non-historic nations,” according to which national reactionary remnants, “national refuse,” vainly sought to avoid being “mercilessly crushed” by the onward march of history.¹¹ Hegelian concepts of enlightened nations being fully entitled to dominate “barbarians” persisted within the tradition, and there are distinct echoes of that position in Marx and Engels’s approval of the French conquest of Algeria, Germany’s efforts to regain Schleswig-Holstein, and the American invasion of Mexico.

In the early works of Marx and Engels there was an overriding emphasis on the *economic* logic underlying the emergence of nations: a successful nation, worthy of sustained analytical attention, was one based on “a certain level of economic and social development.”¹² It was by no means incumbent on Marxists to protest against all acts of national oppression – especially if the oppression was collateral damage in an otherwise admirable march of economic progress. And Lenin

in 1913 tends to align himself with this tradition, when he argues that “*other conditions being equal*, the class conscious proletariat will always stand for the larger state.”¹³ Latin American parties were caught up in this economicistic spirit: the Brazilian party actually arrived at the position that Brazil’s proletariat had everything to gain from capitalist development. In a setting where everything depended on defeating feudalism, socialism “was postponed to an undefined future.”¹⁴ The unmistakable result of such an emphasis on the economic determinants of the nation was that the “national fact” started to lose any real existence, reduced to a “reflection of reality in the realm of ideology.”¹⁵ Ernest Gellner wittily called this the “wrong address theory of nationalism”: somehow, through a terrible mistake at the post office, a message of awakening and enlightenment intended for *classes* came to be delivered to *nations*, leaving Marxists to scramble to say that the nations were really classes in disguise.¹⁶ In this reading of the Marxist tradition, nationalists competed with Marxists. And those who thought otherwise earned the derision of orthodox communists.

Even *The Communist Manifesto* itself, with its famous passages declaring that “the proletariat has no country,” might, as Löwy suggests, be taken as an “ironical and provocative statement,” best interpreted as a suggestion that proletarians in all countries “have the same interests.” The nation-state was, for Marx’s proletariat, “the immediate political framework for the seizure of power.” *The Communist Manifesto* hoped workers would become the leading class of the nation, and Marx polemicized against the “national nihilism” of the rival followers of French anarchist Pierre-Joseph Proudhon – a phrase that was to play a subsequent role in Marxism-Leninism.¹⁷ The most powerful and enduring of Marx’s writings on the nation were those in which he focused on Ireland, wherein Löwy discerns three themes:

- (1) only the national liberation of the oppressed nation enables national divisions and antagonisms to be overcome, and permits the working class of both nations to unite against their common enemy, the capitalists; (2) the oppression of another nation helps to reinforce the ideological hegemony of the bourgeoisie over workers in the oppressing nation: ‘Any nation that oppresses another forges its own chains’; (3) the emancipation of the oppressed nation weakens the economic, political, military and ideological bases of the dominating classes in the oppressor

nation and this contributes to the revolutionary struggle of the working class of that nation.¹⁸

Far from neglecting nationalism, twentieth-century European Marxists lavished attention on it, but their theses varied widely. A distinctive approach was taken by Rosa Luxemburg, who in 1908 outlined her position on “The National Question and Autonomy,” and protested against any socialist preoccupation with the supposed “right of self-determination” on the grounds that it was abstract and metaphysical, a capitulation to bourgeois nationalism, and (echoing Engels) an attempt to repeal the laws of history condemning minor nations (e.g., her native Poland) to absorption by the stronger (e.g., Russia).¹⁹ Karl Kautsky, on the other hand, perhaps the most influential intellectual of the pre-1914 socialist movement and the Second International (1889–1916) which the Comintern aspired to replace as a more coherent, revolutionary force, placed the national question in his overarching social-evolutionary framework: the empires still present in Europe (Russia, Austro-Hungary, Turkey) were essentially atavisms, destined to be upended by liberation movements which thus played a progressive role in history.²⁰ Leon Trotsky argued that the needs of economic development, which Marxists supported, called for the end of the nation-state, that hindrance to the expansion of productive forces; contradictorily, he also supported the rights of “nations” to self-determination.²¹

When contemporary writers and scholars access the Marxist tradition, they often refer to writers that were either sidelined by the Bolshevik Revolution or who did not attain much international prominence until well after their deaths. Among the Austro-Marxists, Otto Bauer and Karl Renner – whose works are enjoying an interesting twenty-first-century resurgence among scholars of multiculturalism²² – attempted to theorize nations as cultural phenomena and tried to work out the constitutional implications for states, such as Austro-Hungary, that incorporated a wide diversity of ethnic, linguistic, and religious groups, some of which regarded themselves as “nations.” Renner was one of the first Marxist theorists to note the similarities between the domestic treatment of nationalities in Austro-Hungary and the exploitation of colonized people in colonial empires, a theme that Otto Bauer would later expand upon in his own work.²³

Of particular significance to contemporary students of the nation and nationalism is Antonio Gramsci. His theorization of the

“national-popular” and the “people-nation” distinguished rigorously between the “national element,” or the “different and specific histories of each social formation, and the different historicities expressed in the particular relations of force that determine the context of each society,” and the “nationalistic element,” made up principally of middle-class intellectuals striving to develop a sense of an eternal nation, a preconception that required “anti-historical intellectual acrobatics.”²⁴ For Gramsci, a significant flaw of many revolutionary strategies of the 1920s was their failure to recognize that “the internal relations of any nation are the result of a combination which is ‘original’ and (in a certain sense) unique: these relations must be understood and conceived in their originality and uniqueness if one wishes to dominate them and direct them.”²⁵ Writing from the experience of someone both inspired by the Russian Revolution and frustrated by the mechanical imposition of Comintern directives, Gramsci was attempting to deploy “popolo-nazione” as an analytical rather than a prescriptive term. Only if external directives were creatively interpreted by a national (not “nationalist”) movement endowed with a detailed and subtle grasp of the people it wished to transform could they become active and useful elements in a revolutionary process.²⁶ Hence, without being “nationalists,” such organic intellectuals of the new social order were called upon to be intensely preoccupied with mastering the national peculiarities of their respective societies. These ideas were shared by Frantz Fanon, whose writings on the psychological and racial dynamics of anti-colonial resistance are often strikingly reminiscent of Gramsci.²⁷ Gramsci, in essence, broke with the mainstream Marxist tradition on this and many other questions.

By far the most influential authors after 1920 on the national question with respect to the Communist International and its transnational impact were Lenin and Joseph Stalin. As was the case in other spheres, Lenin was a close follower of Kautsky, especially his work before the First World War.²⁸ Lenin’s “The Right of Nations to Self-Determination” (1913) is emphatic in its down-the-line support of Kautsky’s “irrefutably” proven points. At the same time, it placed the freedom to secede at the heart of the revolutionary stance on the national question: paradoxically, it was only by asserting the freedom of any oppressed nation to secede that one might envisage a future in which all nations were united and, perhaps, no longer in need of protective political institutions. Eventually national differences would be rendered obsolete. Drawing heavily on Marx on Ireland, Lenin thought that world

working-class unity could only be achieved by workers in the oppressor nations fighting for the right to self-determination of workers in the oppressed nations, within which all the toiling masses, and not just the proletariat, could join together in the struggle against imperialism. (This line of demarcation between the oppressed and oppressor nations superseded Engels's emphasis on the historic and non-historic ones.) Workers in imperialist countries might, through solidarity with the oppressed nations, be "won to revolutionary internationalism."²⁹ Thus a Leninist who placed the political imperative of revolution ahead of everything else could not evade waging anti-imperialist struggles that might well involve alliances with heterogeneous social elements and ideological tendencies, always with the proviso that they work under the leadership of the advanced workers.³⁰ Lenin seemed relatively uninterested in the ontological and epistemological status of nations as historical phenomena, but, placing revolutionary politics in command, he was highly interested in the epochal potential that liberating nations from empires might hold.

In 1912, Lenin called upon the Georgian revolutionary Joseph Stalin to write an important article on the national question. It came out in 1913 in the Bolshevik magazine *Prosveschenie* (Enlightenment) under the title "The National Question and the Social Democracy," and in 1914 as a pamphlet entitled *The National Question and Marxism*. (It was finally made available to English-language readers in 1935 as *Marxism and the National Question*.)

Although every attempt would subsequently be made to say that Lenin and Stalin were as one on the national question, in fact this was not really the case. Ultimately, their differences of approach would be dramatized in Lenin's 1923 "Letter to the Congress" (or "Testament"), where, in addition to complaining about Stalin's high-handed ways, he targeted specifically the general secretary's interpretation of nations and nationalism. In contrast to Lenin (and pursuing a very different strategy than Gramsci), Stalin was interested in grasping the underlying social-evolutionary logic of nations in general, and thus in defining which human communities were, and which were not, "nations." (Thus, unlike Lenin, he placed little emphasis on the distinction between oppressor and oppressed nations.) His memorable and oft-repeated definition of the nation, developed in his characteristic catechetical question-and-answer form, was that "a nation is a historically constituted, stable community of people, formed on the basis of a common language, territory, economic life, and psychological

make-up manifested in a common culture.” Stalin began this work by denouncing, as did most Marxists, “nationalism,” an epidemic against which true socialists must defend the workers.³¹ He renounced the notion that a nation was basically “racial or tribal,” but insisted that it was “historically constituted.” A nation was inconceivable without a common language – indeed, no nation could speak more than one language, although, as Americans and Britons demonstrated, two nations could speak the same one. (In vivid contrast to actual communist practice, orthodox Stalinist theory implied that officially bilingual countries such as Canada or unofficially bilingual countries such as the United States should forsake any hope of becoming nations.) Just as fundamental, and perhaps more, was the nation’s stable existence in a common territory. Yet even this was not enough, because a nation could hardly emerge in a territory not unified by a common economy, as was evidenced by the case of Stalin’s own Georgians, who had been split up among various competing and uncohesive principalities and could not be considered a nation until they achieved something in the order of a common economic life. Finally – and here Stalin perhaps unconsciously drew close to the work of the very Austro-Marxists he was otherwise intent on denouncing – there was the question of “psychology” or “spiritual complexion,” manifesting itself in all the “peculiarities of national culture.”

Having enumerated these four bedrock conditions, Stalin concluded: “We have now exhausted the characteristic features of a nation.” It was simply the case that if *one* of these characteristics was missing, “the nation ceases to be a nation.” All of them must be present and accounted for. A heavy emphasis was laid upon both language and territory; a nation could hardly exist if its members were dispersed within a multi-national state, and it was an impermissible lapse into idealism to divorce “a nation from the soil” and convert it into something “mystical, intangible and supernatural.” Socialists could only reckon with *real* nations – not the *paper* nations imagined into being by those like Bauer who stitched their theories together with “idealistic threads.”³²

Many have since seconded Ronaldo Munck’s verdict that Stalin’s ostensibly “empirical procedure” accorded the nation a “permanent and transhistorical role.” His seemingly coherent definition would ultimately play an influential role for all the parties answering to the Comintern. As Munck puts it, “Stalin produced a dogmatic definition of the nation which was later used as a checklist to assess

whether a people met the criteria to become a nation. It never occurred to Stalin that a community might decide for itself to be a nation.” For all its “undialectical and scholastic approach,” Stalin’s slight piece had a significant intellectual and political influence throughout the movement.³³

THE COMMUNIST INTERNATIONAL

In March 1919, the Bolsheviks, along with support from the Zimmerwald Left and a handful of European communists who shared their belief in the need for a new revolutionary centre, founded the Communist International, or Comintern. The Comintern’s establishment represented an attempt by these communists to seize the leadership of revolutionary Marxism from what they felt was the ideologically bankrupt, and now splintered, Second International. The Comintern also created an apparatus to allow some of the ideas, especially those of Bolshevik leaders, to evolve into a practical set of tactics for colonial liberation, anti-imperialism and self-determination of nations. The Comintern took a strong position on fighting imperialism. In its earliest years, the Comintern made self-determination and racial equality key demands in its program for world revolution.

The Comintern’s founding congress included a forceful critique of the Second International and the European imperial countries. When the Second Congress convened in July 1920, international communism was further energized by the results of the end of the First World War and the Paris Peace Conference. The Bolsheviks fought the counter-revolutionaries supported by the Entente powers in the Russian Civil War, thereby enhancing their anti-imperial credentials. The failures of Wilsonianism in adequately dealing with the surge of colonial nationalism meant that colonized peoples and nationalist movements were looking for other willing partners to help them in their struggles for independence. Lenin realized the revolutionary potential of turning the Comintern’s attention to “the East,” and developed the Theses on the National and Colonial Question. In suggesting that the colonial world could pass through to a communist revolution without a requisite bourgeois forerunner, Lenin turned the existing Marxist orthodoxy on its head. He also intimated, initially, that communists operating in the colonial world should work with bourgeois-nationalist groups in order to help ensure the success of nationalist movements that could later be turned into communist ones.

One delegate to the Second Congress took issue with part of Lenin's plan for colonial revolution. Indian communist M.N. Roy disagreed with Lenin's desire to work with bourgeois-democratic nationalist groups. Feeling that Lenin had misread the nature of some nationalist movements in his pre-circulated preliminary theses, Roy recommended working with national-revolutionary segments of colonial populations. The difference was not a minor one to Roy. He argued that "the real strength of the liberation movements in the colonies is no longer confined to the narrow circle of bourgeois-democratic movements."³⁴ Instead, the national-revolutionary movement in the colonies was "the vanguard of the working class in their respective countries ... and reflect[s] the aspirations of the masses."³⁵ For Roy, by working with those willing to fight for revolutionary aims, and not merely to reinforce capitalism upon the achievement of independence, communists would ensure that the revolution would spread to the colonized world. Lenin accepted this criticism. Both Lenin's Theses and Roy's Supplemental Theses were accepted by the Congress. Whether Roy's Theses were considered following the Congress, however, remains a point of discussion in Comintern historiography.³⁶

Roy remained engaged by colonial issues on the Comintern's behalf for most of the 1920s and was extensively involved in early attempts to build a communist party in India. Following Lenin's death, Roy was the Comintern's main theorist on colonial affairs; he sat on the Anglo-American Secretariat and was also sent to China to help the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in hopes of fomenting a Chinese Revolution. At the Fourth Congress, he made another crucial addition to the discussion with his "Theses on the Eastern Question." He suggested that there were three types of colonies: those similar to European nations in terms of capitalist development, those with some capitalist development, and those with none. The first two types were situations in which bourgeois nationalists could strangle revolutionary movements. The third provided much more scope for communists to align with revolutionary nationalists.³⁷

Roy, however, fell from grace, and the "Theses on the Eastern Question" came to be all but ignored by the Comintern. At the Sixth Comintern Congress, in the shadow of the failed partnership between the Guomindang and the CCP in China, the Comintern opted for a loose set of theses that both demanded an end to united-front policies (and therefore insisted on communist leadership for any revolutionary movements), and also called for a consideration of local conditions,

including the allowance of some work with national-revolutionary groups – provided that communists were aware of the limitations of such an approach. The Sixth Congress also reaffirmed the primacy of Lenin's Theses, seemingly displacing Roy from the pantheon of noteworthy theorists on these questions. Yet it did retain the notion of differentiating among types of colonies. For example, British dominions (not including South Africa or New Zealand) were named secondary imperialist powers. Meanwhile, the Comintern also established or backed front organizations, such as the League against Imperialism, which subsequently had to navigate diplomacy-induced fluctuations in Comintern doctrine.

Beginning at the Second Congress, the Comintern also referred to racial inequality. From the late twentieth century, many authorities have probed, often very acutely, the pitfalls and potentials of Marxist analyses of race.³⁸ Lenin casually mentioned race in his Theses on the National and Colonial Question, making the fight against racial chauvinism another priority for communist parties.³⁹ Roy also noted the role of race in his explanation of his Supplemental Theses.⁴⁰ The Third and Fourth Comintern Congresses saw some further debate on racial issues. South African and black communists provided new insights, respectively. Realizing the revolutionary potential inherent in the “Negro” question,⁴¹ Comintern leaders started to encourage blacks to travel to the Soviet Union to attend its Lenin School. These black communists in turn prompted the Comintern to take measures against competing forces, such as Garveyism (which urged blacks to go “Back to Africa”) and Pan-Africanism. The Comintern established various commissions and bureaus in the 1920s to provide tactical leadership on the Negro question. Initially, these bodies tended to overemphasize American problems. Arguably, it would not be until the Sixth Comintern Congress that the Comintern considered the Negro question more generally, and even then, its focus tended to be on the black Atlantic. Efforts of the Comintern on these issues were exemplified by the development of the International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers (ITUCNW), which was a subsection of the Red International of Labor Unions (RILU) aimed at reaching black workers on both sides of the Atlantic. It was led, at different times, by such luminaries as the future American vice-presidential candidate James Ford and the Pan-Africanist George Padmore.⁴²

During the post-1928 Third Period, one also saw the most radical application of Comintern tactics on the Negro question. There was

acceptance of the self-determination of nations on racial lines. Specific African peoples came to be considered “nations,” in line with Stalin’s criteria (but arguably subtly modifying them). The problem was that this new tactic ran counter to classic Marxism, which tended to downplay racial differences as strictly the products of class society that tended to encourage disunity within the international proletariat. Some communists, as seen in South Africa and Peru, saw the new line as damaging to the efforts of communism or not reflective of the aims of racialized populations in the nation. This issue – whether to promote racial equality through self-determination, or by downplaying racial difference – remained a significant problem.

THE NATIONAL AND COLONIAL QUESTION AND THE COMINTERN

The topic of the national and colonial question has been understudied in the history of the Comintern. Many of the authoritative works on the subject were published before the opening of the Comintern archives following the fall of the Soviet Union. E.H. Carr’s series on the history of the Bolshevik Revolution remains one of the most extensive studies of the Comintern’s involvement in colonial affairs. Carr details the Comintern’s early attempts to develop the tactical methods to secure support for communism and world revolution, while also noting some of the limits of early Comintern engagement. He notes that the Comintern was at the whim of Soviet diplomacy, and the near disappearance of discussion of colonial affairs at the Third Comintern Congress in 1921 was the result of improved relations with Great Britain. Carr, however, is quick to note growing support from colonial delegations and representatives in spite of these limitations.⁴³ Richard Pipes argues that the Comintern was also genuinely committed to the colonial world to some extent in these earlier years, despite potential conflicts with Soviet diplomacy.⁴⁴ Stephen White expands on the Comintern’s commitment to the national and colonial questions under Lenin in a series of articles. He notes that while some certainly saw the Comintern’s interest in the national and colonial question as a tactical manoeuvre designed to undermine British imperialism and little else, it would be wrong to dismiss its lasting contribution to global debates. White’s articles build on the general narrative and point out the centrality of fighting British imperialism to the Comintern’s efforts. White further establishes the

limitations of the Comintern, in particular the need of the Soviet Union to engage in diplomatic relations with other nations. The 1921 Anglo-Soviet Trade Agreement is seen as one example of the clash of ideological and pragmatic interests, and a barrier to the Soviet Union fully committing to revolutionary aims. Bolsheviks genuinely wanted world revolution and they were resolved to make the treaty work – thus placing themselves in a politico-ethical dilemma. Furthermore, White notes that while the Comintern had general ideas, the local variations proved difficult for the organization to accommodate.⁴⁵

As White suggests, one serious discussion related to the national and colonial questions and the Comintern revolves around whether the Comintern ever actually cared about the colonial world. Was it cynically using the East, as it pursued an unrelentingly Eurocentric agenda? Whereas some historians do note this tendency in the Comintern's early years, it tends to be after Stalin's rise to power that its Eurocentrism becomes impossible to ignore. Carr suggests that following the Sixth Comintern Congress, and the shift to class-against-class tactics, the Comintern became progressively more preoccupied with European affairs, and in particular, with European diplomacy.⁴⁶ Eurocommunist Fernando Claudin is another one of the more notable and forceful voices. He argues that the Comintern never cared about the East and always paid greater attention to Europe, ignoring colonial affairs whenever it could. This was especially evident following Lenin's death.⁴⁷ Many diplomatic historians have echoed these arguments, claiming that the Comintern of the 1930s was nothing more than the Soviet state's diplomatic pawn.⁴⁸ Others have explored the extent to which the internationalism of the Comintern faded away under Stalin, with David Brandenberger offering a convincing take that focuses on Stalin's editing of the *Short Course*.⁴⁹ More recently, Silvio Pons has argued that the major attempts by the Communist International to support colonial liberation had more to do with undermining Britain's global position than with genuinely hoping to accelerate nationalist movements. The Comintern always had its eye on Europe.⁵⁰ However, one limitation of this discussion is that it tends to minimize the ways that communist ideas about nations and anti-colonialism lastingly resonated in the colonial world.

The historiography on the Comintern and racial issues is also under-developed in a general sense. Earlier in the historiography, racial issues were discussed in conjunction with the colonial and national question and generally followed the Comintern's lead of treating them as

different sides of the same issues. The earliest and most significant account of the Comintern and race came with Roger Kanet's article in *Survey* in 1973. Kanet details the general narrative of the Negro question. He argues that the Comintern, directly influenced by Soviet diplomatic aims, focused on blacks in both the United States and South Africa with little, if any, attention to local conditions, applying uniform tactics and forcing communists in both countries to implement self-determination on racial lines.⁵¹

The Negro question, focused overwhelmingly on the United States and South Africa, has dominated discussions of the Comintern and race. This attention is understandable given the centrality of racial issues in both countries. In the American context, several document collections have been published seeking to expose the tactics and ideological evolution of communism in America, with a distinct focus on Comintern interference. The collections explore how American communists dealt with race issues, how the Comintern had firm control over their tactics, and how Moscow perverted the dreams of equality that some American communists cherished with respect to African Americans.⁵² Historians Mark Solomon and Jacob Zumoff have sought to show the interaction between American communists – especially African American communists – and Comintern officials as they sought to determine an appropriate solution to the problem of Garveyism and its influence in the United States, while also better courting black workers.⁵³ Zumoff, in particular, shows the ways in which the Black Belt Nation thesis – calling for national self-determination for those parts of the US South with a black majority – became a political football in the factional fights convulsing the US party, and how this seemingly off-the-wall proposal did little damage to the party as it effectively organized in the South. Despite the supposed “albatross” of this thesis, the communists in the South made dramatic gains among blacks; by August 1930, the CP claimed no fewer than fifty members in Birmingham, Alabama alone.⁵⁴ In the South African context, the emphasis on race is used to show how the Comintern practically ruined the Communist Party of South Africa as a force for worker and racial equality, hampering its ability to build a unified proletarian movement. Instead, the party alienated workers, both white and non-white, with the implementation of a Native Republic Thesis that sought independence for the black African working class but which could be easily misinterpreted as hostile to the interests of white workers.⁵⁵ In both cases, prominent members of

each party were expelled for attempting to impede policies on race that were backed by the Comintern.

The attention to these regions is in some ways justified, as the Comintern did to an extent emphasize the United States and South Africa. Still, there is an urgent need to expand this conversation, beyond the Negro question, to race more generally.⁵⁶ In Latin America, even though Latin American communists sat on Negro Commissions, research on the topic lags behind. Manuel Caballeros's study on the Comintern in Latin America focuses only marginally on race, mentioning it just twice in his entire work, despite the fact that certain bodies, such as the ITUCNW, placed emphasis on the black Atlantic, and much of Latin America was treated as a "colonial region," directly in the shadow of, at the very least, American imperialism.⁵⁷ Fortunately, Margaret Stevens's recent monograph has filled this gap well, intentionally focusing on the "black Caribbean," exploring the relationships between the CPUSA and several Caribbean communist parties in organizing and being a voice for black workers, and, in turn, considering how black workers influenced tactics in the Americas.⁵⁸ Meanwhile, Evan Smith has looked at how the Communist Party of Great Britain considered race. Themes evident in the United States resonated well beyond the early 1930s, and beyond the specific countries with which they are associated.⁵⁹

Marc Becker has attempted to transcend the focus on the Negro question when looking at Jose Mariátegui and the Peruvian Communist Party. Becker argues that the Comintern hoped to extend some of its platforms on racial self-determination, as defined by its tactics on the Negro question, to South American contexts.⁶⁰ Anticipating the work of Benedict Anderson on "imagined communities," Mariátegui wrote that the "nation itself is an abstraction, an allegory, a myth that does not correspond to a reality that can be scientifically defined."⁶¹ Mariátegui, very much like Gramsci, was not very interested in a Stalin-like pursuit of the ahistorical essence of "the nation." Rather, both theorists sought to ground their respective Marxisms – Italian and Peruvian – in the social and cultural realities that they confronted, with particular emphasis on the potentially transformative role of Indigenous and subaltern traditions. Both of them are forceful reminders of the limitations of imagining that the Comintern's teachings on nations and nationalism were passively received.⁶²

Meanwhile, there has been a growing literature focusing on the intersection of broader movements with the Comintern on these issues.

For example, Hakim Adi's account of the role of Pan-Africanist thought and communism during the interwar period provides one of the first organizational histories of the efforts of the Comintern and individual communists to deal with racial inequality and to respond to rival Pan-Africanist ideologies such as Garveyism. Adi argues that the Comintern had a genuine interest in the Negro question. Its efforts to support events such as the American Negro Labor Congress in Chicago in 1925, and multiple commissions and bureaus dedicated to African American or black African issues, lend credence to his thesis. Adi, while focusing mainly on the efforts in America and South Africa, importantly adds Latin America and other African regions to his discussion. Though his study concentrates entirely on the black Atlantic, it provides the fullest account of international communism and race available to scholars at this point.⁶³

Holger Weiss and Fredrik Petersson, both based in Finland, have each provided complete histories of specific bodies which, while discussed generally in the historiography, now require reconsideration in light of the newly accessible archives. Weiss details the prominent place of the ITUCNW in Comintern tactics and demonstrates the international and transnational nature of its efforts to unite the black Atlantic.⁶⁴ Petersson, meanwhile, has published widely on the League against Imperialism and helped us better understand the role of anti-imperial networks and the influence that the Comintern, and international communism, had on them.⁶⁵ As Serge Wolikow points out in a recent publication, we know more about the organizations and structures of the Comintern than ever before, and that knowledge base keeps growing.⁶⁶

THE OPENING OF THE ARCHIVES

One of the major events in recent times for historians of communism has been the opening of the Comintern archives – so that what was once one of the world's more secretive organizations has suddenly become one of its most “transparent” and documented. No historian with red blood in his or her veins would say this was not a good thing; yet in some respects the opening has inadvertently intensified the “head-office” view of the movement. This huge repository of records is rich in documents revealing how Moscow and the parties answerable to it tried to shape their agendas – and relatively less revealing of the ways in which the “Moscow Rules” may have been variously

interpreted, neglected, or creatively reworked over time. Without a doubt, the new papers do shed light on the national, colonial, and racial questions – it is just that they need to be interpreted carefully and with an eye to the possibility that they may not show everything.⁶⁷ If read too simplistically, they suggest a unified and coherent Moscow perspective. Read critically, the new documentation, as suggested by Alexander Vatlin and S.A. Smith, indicates that “there was far more conflict over policy within [the Executive Committee of the Communist International (ECCI)] – even into the 1930s – than was once assumed. ECCI ... was working in the dark when it came to ... policy for national liberation in economically backward, colonial, and semi-colonial countries.” The upshot was a policy of “calculated ambiguity,” enabling ECCI to claim “credit for or repudiate policy according to the results of its implementation on the ground.”⁶⁸ Often such records need to be read “against the grain,” so that, for example, long complaints about indiscipline, inattentiveness to assigned tasks, bourgeois individuality, and so on can be taken as indications of considerable rank-and-file self-activity.

Many scholars, ranging from old Cold Warriors to New Left historians, have looked to these records to explain how national communist parties were hamstrung or diverted by the edicts of a Moscow bent on imposing iron discipline. They have forwarded the concept of a totalitarian, monolithic Communist International with member parties and individuals falling into lockstep with what the Comintern leadership demanded. If parties failed to meet Moscow’s demands, the Comintern leadership and bureaucracy came down hard on the erring members, expelling them to ensure that the party fell back into line. According to some of these studies, individuality was simply not possible, and if it was, it was only with respect to issues irrelevant to the big picture. At worst, many communists were handy dupes, tricked by the Comintern into becoming Soviet puppets. On the other side, a revisionist school has developed, much of it drawing inspiration from the same sources, that seeks to show the limitations of Comintern control on individual members or individual national parties. While the Comintern sought to be a centralized organization, complete with a set of precepts that all communists were expected to follow, tactics could not be applied everywhere and in the same fashion. Each party did have the freedom to revise these tactics, and, in some cases, completely ignore Moscow’s edicts.⁶⁹ These studies place emphasis on the agency of people and parties, and argue that the Comintern could

not have been the monolithic body it was reputed to be: there were too many moving parts, among them many individuals nurturing their own hopes and dreams.⁷⁰ The debate often takes a highly dichotomized form, with “traditionalists” and “revisionists” confronting each other; as usual, sometimes nuance and interpretive sophistication have been sacrificed to polarized polemic.

A few observations are in order about this literature. First, there can be little doubt that the Comintern as an organization was established both to safeguard the Bolshevik regime in Russia and to create a disciplined and centralized movement dedicated to promulgating and diffusing a specific version of socialism throughout the planet. There was a strong drive inherent in the Communist International to bind member parties to a specific form of organization. Communists who seemed to be diverging from this model stood to be punished – sometimes expelled, as in the case of most Westerners, but sometimes killed, as in the tragic cases of many from the vulnerable countries closer to the Soviet Union. There was a centralizing momentum in the Comintern, so that national parties that once might have considered themselves relatively free (or at least distant) from control by Moscow came to be more and more directly answerable to its imperatives. As Carr suggests, line changes in the Comintern often correlated with the diplomatic interests of the Soviet Union: one soft-pedalled anti-imperialism at the Third Congress, he suggests, largely because of the Soviet-British Trade Agreement, even to the extent of pledging the Soviets not to undertake propaganda in the Britain’s Asian colonies contrary to Britain’s interests.⁷¹

This centralizing momentum was equally in evidence in the 1928 Third Period shift from United Front policies to “class against class”; the “line change” of 1935 to the Popular Front; the Nazi-Soviet Pact of August 1939; the equally dramatic change of course in June 1941 sparked by the German invasion; and the unexpected dissolution of the Communist International itself on 15 May 1943. Each of these had dramatic implications for each of the national parties, and so for all those whom the national parties influenced. A veritable cottage industry has developed around each of these line changes, and with good reason: not only were they highly significant for local parties crafting their strategies, but, for communists hoping to follow to Moscow’s desires, they created a chaotic milieu. The notorious Nazi-Soviet Pact, a scandal throughout much of the communist world, played out very differently in societies unsympathetic to the British

Empire, with each party reacting differently. Some communists left the movement altogether.

A loyal communist was not only expected to go along with each of these line changes, but to make them effective in his or her national setting. Although this might be, and has been, assimilated to a “totalitarian model” of the Soviet Union – that is, a top-down, authoritarian, and militaristic regime imposing an equally rigid organizational form on a supposedly international movement of communist parties – various complications ensue when this is held to be an unvarying, homogeneous pattern. The model is misleadingly applied to the early years of the Comintern, when members of national parties felt free to express opinions in Moscow that were opposed to those of the Russian party – which was itself not a homogeneous entity. Moreover, if the fact of Stalin’s ascendancy in the Comintern is not debatable, its chronology certainly is: some activist historians, keen to blame the Georgian for everything they dislike about Comintern policies, track his ascendancy back before 1924, whereas others note Stalin’s relative uninterest in the Comintern and the diversity of strong personalities and divergent positions still found within it as late as 1935.

Second, similar points may be made with regard to official doctrines of nation and race, the latter of which is the least adequately explored in the literature focused specifically on the Comintern (while giving rise to an immensely productive historiography in such countries as the United States).⁷² Contrary to stereotype, some in the Second International – Kautsky pre-eminently – had devoted serious time and thought to race and had responded critically to received theories.⁷³ There was indeed, at any given point (at least after the Comintern’s Third Congress), an implicit Moscow line with respect to race. In the Comintern, this line manifested itself in the general Theses on the National and Colonial Question and the Theses on the Colonies and the Semicolonies. Both the Native Republic thesis (South Africa) and the Black Belt Nation thesis (United States) proceeded from the assumption that race was an important category of analysis. After its early dalliance with a racist position on colonial troops of colour in Europe, the Comintern’s positions of the 1920s became more overtly anti-racist, in part because this strategy offered rich potential for revolutionary struggles against colonialism. The colour line so scandalously affirmed in Versailles might find its challengers in Moscow – to the keen interest of the oppressed in Japan, China, and (eventually) Africa and Latin America. Yet as Kautsky confessed, and

subsequent Comintern practice amply confirmed, sharp critiques of biologically based definitions of race were no substitute for rigorous reflection on how Marxists should handle the category of “race” and those subjected to it. The Comintern helped generate a fascinating series of challenging theses and helped stimulate an impressive array of intellectuals – Claude McKay, C.L.R. James, George Padmore, to name but three – but it seems doubtful that it gave posterity a coherent materialist theory of race.⁷⁴ Instead, the “race” and the “colonial” question were often confused and even conflated. The anti-racist line, such as it was, was instituted chaotically. In some ways, counterintuitively, the Comintern can be criticized for indulging in a kind of visionary utopianism on this issue, disconnected from the actual world in which activists had to live and struggle.

For example, the “Black Belt” thesis – according to which Afro-Americans who were a majority in a contained area should be accorded national status and the right to self-determination – might be judged an instance of Stalinism, which “helped frame the discussion about race in non-Marxist, almost absurdly nationalist ways, conceiving of Afro-Americans … as a *separate nation*.⁷⁵ It seems absurdly nationalist, perhaps, because the existence of the United States as a nation-state seems commonsensical and obvious (or at least it did after the 1860s and prior to 2016). Yet from a radically different perspective, *no* nation-state or nation is exempt from being a historically specific construct explainable in terms of wider global processes. By putting forward a dramatically different vision of the US South, complete with maps, the Comintern effected for some people a radical defamiliarization of the country where they lived – albeit one that might have lethal consequences if one gave voice to it on the hustings in Mississippi.⁷⁶ Why *should* contemporaries regard as permanent, solid “things” countries such as the United States, or, to take a case about which the Comintern spoke less provocatively, Canada? Such “views from nowhere” – ones that proceeded by disregarding on-the-ground common-sense realities, but upheld a longer-term vision – might in later years exercise an unpredictable and sometimes creative subversive power. It is easy to see the connections between the Black Belt and the Black Panthers, with their aura of being a “state-in-gestation.”⁷⁷

Stalin’s *Marxism and the National Question* of 1913 was not considered to be of sufficient weight for inclusion in the English-language editions of his *Selected Works* that came out after 1928. Yet, it did have a considerable impact after it was published in the collection

Marxism and the National and Colonial Questions in 1935. In its drive to establish once and for all the correct definition of the term “nation,” it became even more authoritative than the works of Lenin on the same topic. From 1924 (the death of Lenin) to 1943 (the dissolution of the Comintern) and well into the 1970s and 1980s (notwithstanding the denunciation of Stalin by Khrushchev at the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1956), Stalin’s four big criteria – common language, common territory, common economic life, and common psychological makeup, all “manifested in a common culture”⁷⁸ – seemed definitive. Proceeding from a mechanical and schematic approach, they were in fact sufficiently vague that one could read into them starkly contrasting ideas. For example, prospective nations could be included in or cast out of the sacred circle of nationhood on the basis of their possessing or lacking an integrated or common “national economy.” Yet, how was this status to be rigorously regulated, in a world growing ever more interconnected? Did Russia itself have a common economy? In effect, Stalin’s definition gave Engels’s flip distinction between “historic” and “non-historic” nations the veneer of twentieth-century science.⁷⁹ It promised theoretical and political clarity. It produced neither.

For example, it is far from obvious that a “common psychological makeup” characterizes all or most people who consider themselves to be members of nations. Leon Trotsky, in the course of a biography of Stalin that very few would consider sympathetic, nonetheless admired his arch-enemy’s “very trenchant piece of research,” and even put notions of the shared psychology of “Southern types” to work in his critical assessment of Stalin’s character. “The national character of the Georgians is usually represented as trusting, impressionable, quick-tempered, while at the same time devoid of energy and initiative,” Trotsky writes; he adds another writer’s assessment of the Georgians’ “gaiety, sociability and forthrightness.” These terms did not seem to sum up Stalin very well, which led Trotsky to generalize as follows:

In the countries of the Mediterranean Sea, in the Balkans, in Italy, in Spain, in addition to the so-called Southern type, which is characterized by a combination of lazy shiftlessness and explosive irascibility, one meets cold natures, in whom phlegm is combined with stubbornness and slyness. The first type prevails; the second augments it as an exception. It would seem as if each

national group is doled out its due share of basic character elements, yet these are less happily distributed under the southern than under the northern sun.

At that point, Trotsky himself warns of venturing too far into “the unprofitable region of national metaphysics,” having spent many words doing just that.⁸⁰ Such judgements seem to “today’s reader ... offensively orientalist in spirit,” writes John Riddell, who points out that Trotsky was channelling broadly held attitudes and might well have revised these blithe judgements if he had gotten the chance to edit the manuscript before being assassinated.⁸¹ Trotsky circumvented the problem of a man he judged a mediocrity having written work worthy of an “outstanding theoretician” by attributing much of the latter’s quality to Lenin’s inspiration, “unremitting supervision,” and close editing.⁸² A contemporary reader might well reflect, in a critical and realist vein, on the sheer variability and subjectivity of all such Stalin-like generalizations about the common psychology of any large group of people, and how little they shielded Marxists from commonplace judgements about races and nations.

Equally open to qualification is Stalin’s claim that “nation” should be reserved for those people living together on a definite territory, a criterion by which Stalin felt entitled to exclude Russian, Galician, American, Georgian, and Caucasian Highland Jews. Many Jews, however, had lived together for a long period in the Pale of the Russian Empire, developing as they did so a shared language and culture. And can one really write off the Germans’ feelings of belonging to a nation, even though they lived in a variety of political entities before the Custom Union of 1834 and were decisively unified in a nation-state only in the 1860s and 1870s? And what of diaspora nationalisms, which typically entail strong identifications with a particular homeland among people who are widely separated by territory and, in some cases, even language?

Third, there were the immense complications that arose in socialist states when one attempted to apply such doctrines – and for historians, when one seeks to specify just what that line was and how it was interpreted. For example, Lenin’s position on the “Right of Nations to Self-Determination” was seemingly unequivocal on the inherent right of nations to secede, on the basis of a sharp distinction between oppressor and oppressed nations. It was imperative that communists lead the working class struggles in such oppressed nations, even if

this meant working with petit-bourgeois elements propounding doctrines well removed from Marxism.⁸³ Yet each of these apparently unequivocal positions could be difficult to interpret, let alone to implement, as the subsequent history of Russian (and then Soviet) communism would reveal. There were significant qualifications to the “absolute right to self-determination.” To advocate a right did not necessarily mean to urge its practice. Self-determination could be opposed if it meant federation or the growth of autonomous “national sections,” if it posed a risk to the national and international unity of the party, or if it represented a challenge to democratic centralism. The 1920 occupation of Georgia by the Red Army, under the mystifying slogan of “self-determination,” along with the destruction of separatist movements in Ukraine, Central Asia, and the Far East, led to the growth of “national” wings of the centralized Bolshevik Party. The formal independence of such republics as Russia, Ukraine, Belorussia, and the Caucasus in the 1922 constitution of the Union of Socialist Soviet Republics did not constitute their actual freedom from Moscow. As organized under Stalin’s leadership, the USSR came to be made up of fifteen Union Republics, each of them nominally equal, but living under a constitution that so empowered the central government that the country’s apparent federalism was something of a disguise for a strongly centralized state. This state encompassed 177 nationalities,⁸⁴ each of them given some recognition, even if they lay within the territory of one of the Union Republics. There were also sixteen “autonomous republics,” nine “autonomous regions,” and ten “national areas” designated as “autonomous units” within the Russian regions and territories. Article 17 of the Soviet Constitution recognized the right to secede for every Union Republic. Yet, as always, it paid to read the small print, which could be found in the almost-as-authoritative *Short History of the Communist Party*, where it was noted that this right to secession was in the hands of the “party of the proletariat,” the VKP(b), within which the ideal of democratic centralism strongly militated against any would-be secessionists.⁸⁵ There was a sense that the rhetorical rights of nationalities and their enforceable rights bore no relationship to each other – as a series of events stretching from Karelia to Crimea tragically demonstrated.

The result, some scholars suggest, was the creation of a hierarchy – “party, class, nation” – governing a state with three potentially severe contradictions. The first contradiction was building a strongly unified Soviet Union while enshrining principles of national self-determination

and equality. The second involved the forcible drawing together of distinct national and ethnic groups, with the result that many of them regarded the exercise as a subtle (and, under the later Stalin, not-so-subtle) form of Russification. The third was an emergent clash between creating “states-in-the-making by institutionalizing ethnic administrative boundaries,” and the imperatives of preserving a strongly unified socialist state.⁸⁶ One might add that an approach that was so territorial in nature tended to conflate nation, state, country, and people, so that “nation” came to be increasingly but misleadingly taken as a synonym of “nation-state,” and peoples who did not control their own states were regarded as failed or inconsequential entities. Stalin hinted as much in his 1913 essay: one did not have to worry a great deal about nations that had not established their own states or did not seem on the verge of doing so. But, to consider a counterexample from today’s world, the stateless Kurds are at the very least a factor to reckon with – whether or not they do succeed in creating an independent Kurdistan.

Fourth, outside the socialist bloc, there were equally glaring difficulties implicit in the Leninist approach. One was that of neatly distinguishing between oppressed and oppressor nations. Even if one made the implausible argument that the boundaries of states and nations generally coincided, distinguishing oppressor nations from oppressed nations was not as straightforward as Lenin’s analysis suggested. Peru was plainly an “oppressor” state with respect to the Indigenous peoples upon whose behalf that state claimed to speak; yet it was an oppressed state with respect to its working population’s growing imbrication in global patterns of trade (exemplified by the world-historic significance of the guano trade, which greatly benefitted the landholding aristocracy and its numerous adherents).⁸⁷ As now-abundant studies of settler colonialism show, settlers, fleeing grievous exploitation, oppression, and even genocide in their homelands (Highland Scots, Irish peasants, European Jews) could in a trice become perpetrators of grievous oppression in the lands they colonized.⁸⁸ Stably assigning one group to the “oppressed” and another group to the “oppressor” in such situations seems a challenge to nuanced historical judgment, of the sort the binary opposition makes difficult. This difficulty generates dramatic real-world historical consequences.

Another challenge was posed by the implicit stages theory, which held that communists might first make temporary alliances with the petit-bourgeois elements, even quite deluded and benighted ones, as

long as the Reds staunchly maintained the independence of the proletarian movement and later moved into positions of unequivocal hegemony. The theory, however, was opaque concerning the criteria that should guide militants and theorists as they chose to move from one stage to another. Despite the decisions of the Second Comintern Congress, the distinctions blurred on the ground, and, as the Chinese case made clear in the 1920s, Stalin seemed undeterred by problematic partnerships. How firm could any such alliance be, if one were intending to ditch it at the opportune moment? And if it became *too* firm, did not one then open the risk of lending a communist colouration to movements from which socialists needed to maintain an unyielding independence? A local communist faced, one could say, a Scylla and Charybdis dilemma: if they disregarded “the nation,” they could be charged with national nihilism and cosmopolitanism;⁸⁹ if they paid it close attention, they might become petit-bourgeois nationalists themselves. In that case, the temporary alliance might take on the solidity of something much more permanent – as, arguably, has been the case in countless National Liberation Fronts with very mixed records of actually liberating the oppressed. At what point did the stage of supporting bourgeois nationalists come to an end? And if that stage continued well after the working-class movement had passed through its “embryonic” stage, was it not likely that communists would find themselves in the untenable position of simultaneously supporting bourgeois nationalists and seeking to undermine them (as would be the case in the Chinese Revolution of 1925–27)? How easy was it, in local contexts, to make M.N. Roy’s distinction between bourgeois-democratic and national-revolutionary forces?

Fifth and perhaps most seriously, there was the tension – to which both Mariátegui and Gramsci gave eloquent witness – between the authoritative and “scientific” judgements delivered by prestigious leaders of the world’s most prominent socialist revolution, and the realities on the ground. Both rank-and-file communists and their leaders frequently found themselves wrestling with the perplexities of attempting to apply, and win Comintern approval for, strategies concerning nations and nationalism that were both orthodox and effective. Even the rare figures who possessed the skills and time required to grasp the manifold complexities of the doctrine might nonetheless find themselves taking up themes and theses in a controversial manner. Were the “White Dominions” of the British Empire, for example, “colonies” (still their constitutional status in many

respects) or “nations?” If they were nations, what sort were they – oppressed or oppressor? How should communists in them position themselves with respect to the clash that many Comintern theorists thought inevitable between the American and British Empires? Should they press for complete independence, even if that meant alliances with their respective bourgeoisies?

One further historiographical comment should be made. The opening of the Comintern Archives was most pivotal to historians of national communist parties. Whereas the use of the archives has been a recent development for those who look at the Comintern, in and of itself, national party histories have benefitted from the increased access to crucial party documents. As a result, the historians of virtually every party have been able to derive some new conclusions about some old important debates. Unfortunately, many of these studies fall into equally problematic traps: most crucially, treating these parties as operating in a vacuum, ignoring the international context, ascribing the unknown entirely to Moscow, or overestimating the importance of “one’s own party” for the Comintern’s global efforts. What happens when we shed the artificial boundaries of the nation-state and national party and look at relationships between international communists, instead of simply deploying the centre-periphery model with respect to central issues? How might a move beyond Moscow-centrism and beyond the “national paradigm” shed new light on the worlds of those Brigitte Studer calls the “Cominternians” – people around the globe who shared, to an extent, a “single, shared cultural space,” which can be discerned by mapping “the circulation of practices and ideas within it”?⁹⁰ The Comintern, after an early interest in movements that transcended national boundaries, gradually reapplied national categories in its own thought and practice, and pushed them well beyond the point of reification. It operated on the assumption that nation-states were enduring, “real” phenomena in the world, a conception evident in the way delegations were organized and entire debates were constructed. Paradoxically, it was also frequently a stimulus for and even facilitated horizontal links among communists irrespective of national boundaries. Studer points out that it is difficult to suggest that the Comintern was a “Russian” project. Its international makeup, and the leeway enjoyed by a number of functionaries to mount their own campaigns and take up their own positions, preclude any such characterization.⁹¹ Lisa Kirschenbaum highlights how many believers were willing to fight and die for communism,

such as in the Spanish Civil War. Here was a foundational experience that was not the same as loyalty to the Soviet Union or to Joseph Stalin. Many, especially as they confronted such debacles as the Nazi-Soviet Pact, were still proud communists, even if they had become ambivalent about or hostile to Soviet rule.⁹² Scholars such as Studer and Kirschenbaum are part of a growing, and in our eye immensely productive, tendency.⁹³

Comintern history has begun to appear outside of traditional avenues. Instead of only being a topic for Soviet diplomatic history or the history of the left, some scholars have highlighted the efforts of individuals tied to communism as part of radical networks that existed before, during, and after the Comintern's interwar heyday. Susan Pennybacker includes the efforts of the Comintern and communists such as George Padmore as part of the many European anti-imperial and anti-racist networks that protested against Southern US racism.⁹⁴ Michael Goebel focuses on the Comintern, communism, and the League against Imperialism as examples of how Paris became an "anti-imperial metropolis."⁹⁵

By looking at the networks and topics that the Comintern also used or worked with, the efforts of international communism to fight racial inequality or support colonial liberation are no longer topics on the periphery. And by breaking down the barriers between Comintern-centred studies of nationalism and the broader scholarship of nationalism – the latter typified by Benedict Anderson, Ernest Gellner, E.J. Hobsbawm, A.D. Smith, and others – a more useful conversation might commence about the ways communists themselves theorized the "imagined communities" of which they dreamt. If Marxists often began with a starkly instrumental and economicistic view of "the nation," this was not where many of them wound up. Rather than a prison-house, the Comintern was often a seed-bed.

For every Jawaharlal Nehru, who was a delegate at the 1927 Brussels Congress of the Comintern-supported League against Imperialism, there was a Ho Chi Minh or a James Ford, committed communists in their efforts to liberate their home country or to end racial oppression. Ideas that were ruminated on in communist circles influenced communist revolutions following the Second World War: indirectly, as in Fidel Castro's turn to Marxism after reading the works of Lenin, or directly, as in the consistent support for the Chinese Revolution, which began as a Soviet and Comintern platform. Additionally, many who left communism – whether because they disagreed with its

changing tactics in the 1930s, or were disillusioned by revelations of the Soviet regime's atrocities, the signing of the Nazi-Soviet Pact in 1939, or Nikita Khrushchev's Secret Speech in 1956 – maintained an appreciation for the ideals that the Comintern promoted. Much as Lisa Kirschenbaum has highlighted the anti-fascism of the 1930s as a formative experience for the communists, many nationalists and anti-colonialists had a similar experience with communism's anti-imperial impulses, leading independence movements in Asia and Africa to adopt leftist platforms, explicitly or implicitly, and in turn, enjoying Soviet support.⁹⁶ While combatting racial oppression, Claude McKay, George Padmore, and C.L.R. James all became prominent critics of the Soviet Union. Yet they all had been shaped by, and contributed to, communist debates on racial oppression. Their ideas remained influential into the Cold War era. The Comintern was the international expression of the Bolshevik Revolution; its influence, in this case on anti-imperialism, nationality, and racial equality, looms large in the history of those movements.⁹⁷

It is here where *Left Transnationalism* enters the debate. Some of our contributors are focused on their own countries, but they are still pursuing questions, often shaped by the "cultural turn in communist studies," different than those raised by traditional scholars. Others, by more overtly taking a transnational, or, sometimes, a comparative approach – and by breaking down the borders of nation-states to look at international communism and its efforts across multiple regions – are presenting a picture at odds with the standard centre-periphery model of Moscow Rules. Whether it is by looking at different applications of certain Comintern tactics in different regions, or the various networks in which communists were active, or how communists of certain nationalities struggled to reconcile their own sense of national identity with the imperatives of world communism, the contributors to *Left Transnationalism* are establishing the foundation for new approaches. On that foundation there might emerge new insights into the global cultural challenge constituted by the revolutionary upheaval that the Comintern sought to accelerate.

This volume is separated into four sections. The first section looks at the big picture and overarching frameworks. Lars Lih begins with a review of some of the foundations of Comintern positions on nationality, imperialism, and race. S.A. Smith, looking beyond the Comintern, follows by examining how the Bolshevik Revolution and its ideals resonated throughout the colonial world: first by exploring how

the Bolsheviks themselves became more engaged in ideas of self-determination and imperialism, and then by considering how these ideas were transmitted internationally. John Riddell discusses how the Comintern developed an anti-imperial united front, which resonated loudly in some colonial quarters, but failed to gain as much traction in European communist parties, a contrast evident in the Comintern's failures in China. Finally, Alastair Kocho-Williams looks specifically at early Soviet attempts to undermine British rule in India and establish an Indian communist movement.

The second section focuses on transnational personal connections. Sandra Pujals examines how the radical networks of the Caribbean often led to significant cultural exchanges with figures influenced by communism (directly or indirectly), and in turn, reflected some of these influences in their later artistic endeavours in Latin America. Andrée Lévesque demonstrates how Canadian communists forged a communist identity by enrolling in communist schools, especially in the Soviet Union, and how their sojourns influenced their political outlooks. Xiaofei Tu presents a critical review of Japanese Communist Party leader Nosaka Sanzo, with a particular focus on two episodes that reveal the tensions of national identity and internationalist loyalty, not to speak of his protagonist's stark careerism.

Our third section looks at ethnicity and race. Evan Smith begins the section by looking at how the Communist Party of Great Britain and the Comintern acted as metropoles, influencing or intervening in the development of the Communist parties of South Africa and Australia on issues of imperialism and race, with varying success. Oleksa Drachewych reviews communist tactics on race during the 1920s and 1930s and considers how the Comintern instructed, or failed to instruct, communist parties in British Dominions, leading to an uneven application of tactics on racial equality. Marc Becker looks at the responses of the Peruvian and Ecuadorian Communist Parties to the Latin American Secretariat's demand that they consider the native republic thesis as a solution to the "Indian Question," with each party's leadership responding differently. Kankan Xie rounds out the section by exploring the limits of advocating for the transplantation of a "Chinese model" of revolution, and how "Chineseness" affected the way in which Southeast Asians became involved with communism in the region.

The final section looks specifically at the role of the "national question" in certain contexts. Daria Dyakonova looks at how the Young

Communist League in Canada and the Communist Party of Canada grappled with the national question, exposing problems in how the party dealt with its large ethnic membership and how each group differed in its approach to these issues. Michel Beaulieu focuses on the Lakehead, a region encompassing Thunder Bay, Ontario, Canada, where there was a branch of the Communist Party of Canada with a large Finnish population. In responding to certain local labour and ethnic issues, Beaulieu shows how the Communist Party of Canada in the region tended to be a conservative force for maintaining liberal constructions of nationhood. Ian McKay looks at how Montreal activist Henri Gagnon and the Communist Party of Canada diverged over how to respond to French-Canadian nationhood, and, considering local, national, and transnational factors, examines why the party risked destroying its influence in French Canada by purging Gagnon. Anna Belogurova concludes this section by exploring the Chinese Anti-Imperial Alliance and how Chinese émigrés in North and Central America developed a transnational network of Chinese anti-imperial sentiment, which was linked both to China and to communist parties and organizations in the Americas. The collection concludes by delineating other avenues for research, as many fascinating topics and areas remain that we could not include in this volume.

Left Transnationalism is very much a post-post-Cold War project. During the Cold War, one's stance towards the Soviet Union and communism often reflected one's political affiliation. If not declared, such political affiliations were often imputed. Following the Cold War, some scholars argued that studying communism was of minimal or no importance. Other scholars, especially those on the left, saw a need to rescue certain revolutionary legacies in the hope of avoiding their premature relegation to the dustbin of history. But, as time has passed, the hyper-politicization of the topic has waned. Although political loyalties certainly can manifest themselves in the subjects one finds interesting, they should no longer be seen as a barrier to good historical work. Students of Soviet history in general and the Comintern in particular are united, not in their underlying ideological starting points, but in their commitment to reconsider its history in a realistic way. That is the goal of the two editors of this collection. Despite each of us having his own distinct theoretical and political perspective, we agree with each other on the need for a sober re-evaluation of international communism's role in the ongoing debates about nationality, anti-colonialism, and race. It is time to

escape from our silos, both ideological and disciplinary (cozy as many of them have become), and re-energize this field by looking at new questions, new people, and new ideas. There is a lot at stake.

NOTES

Epigraph from the manifesto of the Communist International: Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv sotsial'no-politicheskoi istorii (RGASPI), 488.1.9, 43.

Epigraph from Theses on the Eastern Question: *Toward the United Front: Proceedings of the Fourth Congress of the Communist International*, 1922, edited by John Riddell (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 1182.

- 1 Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 6–7.
- 2 For a provocative analysis of Stalin as an intellectually consistent “patriot,” see Erik van Ree, *The Political Thought of Joseph Stalin: A Study in Twentieth-Century Revolutionary Patriotism* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002).
- 3 Of notable leftists, see Duncan Hallas, *The Comintern: A History of the Third International* (London: Bookmarks, 1985; reprint, Chicago: Haymarket, 2008) for a lively and useful contribution to this genre; a classic and remarkable early example is C.L.R. James’s mordant analysis of Stalin’s subordination of the Comintern in *World Revolution 1917–1936: The Rise and Fall of the Communist International*, edited by Christian Hogsbjerg (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2017). Most famous among the detractors: Stéphane Courtois et al., eds., *The Black Book of Communism: Crimes, Terror, Repression*, translated by Jonathan Murphy and Mark Kramer (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999).
- 4 A stressing of “international communism” versus the Comintern, Leninism, or Stalinism can be a useful way to distinguish (1) the regimes that perpetrated or encouraged acts that perverted leftist ideals, from (2) those activists who saw communism as a collection of ideas that influenced them to take action or push for certain aims. Many of the latter became ex-communists, but it is unlikely that many of them were uninfluenced by their sojourn among the Reds.
- 5 One should also add to this somber list high-ranking communists in Armenia and Uzbekistan. Yet Comintern people from Western countries

were less at risk: even after his notorious heresy in the 1940s, which was fiercely denounced in the communist press, Earl Browder was given a warm welcome in the USSR. And Canadians who registered complaints about rampant anti-Semitism in the 1950s had to fear for their party positions at home – but not for their lives.

- 6 As is generally acknowledged, Lenin's interest in emphasizing the right to self-determination was his way of “using the national question to supersede nationalism.” In fighting for national independence, socialists would not be fighting for nationalism, but in order to further the class-specific aims of socialism. See Ronaldo Munck, *The Difficult Dialogue: Marxism and Nationalism* (London: Zed Books, 1986), 76. However, workaday Leninists might well have wondered: at what point did the ardent advocacy of national self-determination start to blend into a celebration of the nation that was to become self-determining?

7 *Ibid.*, 1.

- 8 *Ibid.*, 96. French communist leader Maurice Thorez would explain, in the case of Algeria, that rather like the right to divorce, the right to secession need not be exercised. In fact, the “defence of the Algerian people” tended to become, in Munck's harsh words, the Algerians' “subordination to the interests of the metropolitan communist party.”
- 9 For some recent research noting the links between the Comintern and these movements, see Barry Carr, “Pioneering Transnational Solidarity in the Americas: The Movement in Support of Augusto C. Sandino 1927–1934,” *Journal of Iberian and Latin American Research* 20, no. 2 (2014): 141–52; Stephen Ellis, “Nelson Mandela, the South African Communist Party and the Origins of Umkhonto we Sizwe,” *Cold War History* 16, no. 1 (2016): 1–18.

10 Nicos Poulantzas, *State, Power, Socialism* (London: New Left Books, 1980), 93.

11 Michael Löwy, “Marxists and the National Question,” *New Left Review* 1, no. 96 (March–April 1976): 81, 84.

12 Munck, *Difficult Dialogue*, 11.

13 V.I. Lenin, “Kriticheskie zametki po natsional'nomu voprosu,” *Polnoe Sobranie Sochinenii (PSS)* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1963), 24:143, cited in Munck, *Difficult Dialogue*, 72.

14 Munck, *Difficult Dialogue*, 97.

15 *Ibid.*, 147.

16 Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), 124.

- ¹⁷ Ibid., 82–3.
- ¹⁸ Ibid., 83.
- ¹⁹ Ibid., 86. On Luxemburg, see Munck, *Difficult Dialogue*, 50–68; Charles E. Herod, *The Nation in the History of Marxian Thought: The Concept of Nations with History and Nations without History* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1976); H.B. Davis, ed., *The National Question: Selected Writings by Rosa Luxemburg* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1976).
- ²⁰ See M. Salvadori, *Karl Kautsky and the Socialist Revolution 1880–1938* (London: New Left Books, 1979).
- ²¹ Löwy, “Marxists and the National Question,” 90.
- ²² See, for instance, Günther Sandner, “Nations without Nationalism: The Austro-Marxist Discourse on Multiculturalism,” *Journal of Language and Politics* 4, no. 2 (2005), 273–91; Ephraim Nimni, “National-Cultural Autonomy as an Alternative to Minority Territorial Nationalism,” *Ethnopolitics* 6, no. 3 (2007), 345–64; *National-Cultural Autonomy and Its Contemporary Critics* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005).
- ²³ Richard B. Day and Daniel Gaido, eds., *Discovering Imperialism: Social Democracy to World War I* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2011), 42–4, 48–50.
- ²⁴ Panagiotis Sotiris, “From the Nation to the People of a Potential New Historic Bloc: Rethinking Popular Sovereignty through Gramsci,” *International Gramsci Journal* 2, no. 1, 72; see also Antonio Gramsci, “French and Italian Historical Culture,” in *Prison Notebooks*, vol. 2, edited and translated by Joseph A. Buttigieg (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 80–2, Q3§82.
- ²⁵ Gramsci in Quentin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith, eds., *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (New York: International Publishers, 1971), “Internationalism and National Policy,” 240, Q14§68.
- ²⁶ For discussions, see Peter Gibbon, “Gramsci, Eurocommunism and the Comintern,” *Economy and Society* 12, no. 3 (1983); Sotiris, “From the Nation to the People”; and John Schwarzmantel, *Socialism and the Idea of the Nation* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1997), a general appraisal of socialism and nationalism very much in the spirit of Gramsci.
- ²⁷ See A. Sekyi-Otu, *Fanon's Dialectic of Experience* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 118–19.
- ²⁸ Lars T. Lih, *Lenin Rediscovered: What Is to Be Done? in Context* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2006); Lih, *Lenin* (London: Reaktion Books, 2011).
- ²⁹ Alex Callinicos, “Marxism and the National Question,” in *Scotland: Class and Nation*, edited by Chris Bambery (London: Bookmarks, 1999), www.marxists.de/theory/callinicos/natquest.htm.

- 30 Löwy, “Marxists and the National Question,” 97.
- 31 An Enlightenment suspicion of nationalism long haunted the Marxist tradition: Marxists drew a fixed and firm “line of demarcation” separating those enlightened by historical materialism from superstitious or primitive souls who remained mired in nationalist hocus-pocus. Yet, curiously, when they came to power or merely interacted with each other, they readily rediscovered “the nation” they had tended to dismiss: “Marxists prefer to be internationalists,” Horace B. Davis wryly observed in 1978, “and yet everywhere we find Marxists acting as nationalists.” Davis, *Toward a Marxist Theory of Nationalism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1978), 6.
- 32 Stalin, *Marxism and the National Question*, www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1913/03.htm.
- 33 Munck, *Difficult Dialogue*, 77, 79.
- 34 John Riddell, ed., *Workers of the World and Oppressed Peoples, Unite!: Proceedings and Documents of the Second Congress, 1920* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1991), 1:283.
- 35 Ibid., 1:283–4.
- 36 Ibid., 1:76–7; Edward Hallett Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution: 1919–1923* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1966), 3:258.
- 37 Riddell, *Toward the United Front*, 686–7.
- 38 For particularly noteworthy discussions, see Abigail Bakan and Enakshi Dua, eds., *Theorizing Anti-Racism: Linkages in Marxism and Critical Race Theories* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014); David Roediger, *Class, Race, and Marxism* (London and New York: Verso, 2017). For an elegant statement on the incompatibility of Marxism and critical race thinking, see Cedric J. Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000).
- 39 Riddell, *Workers of the World, Unite!*, 1:363–5.
- 40 Ibid., 1:285.
- 41 Although the use of the word “Negro” is no longer considered appropriate today, we have elected in the interest of historical accuracy to maintain the use of the term used by communists during this period here and in subsequent relevant chapters.
- 42 These arguments are made in Oleksa Drachewych, *The Communist International, Anti-Imperialism and Racial Equality in British Dominions* (London: Routledge, 2018), chap. 2.
- 43 Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution*, 3:237–8, 3:253–64, 3:385–6, 3:472–7; E.H. Carr, *The Twilight of the Comintern, 1930–1935* (New York: Pantheon, 1983).

- 44 Richard Pipes, *A Concise History of the Russian Revolution* (New York: Vintage, 1995), 298–9.
- 45 Stephen White, “Communism and the East: The Baku Congress, 1920,” *Slavic Review* 33, no. 3 (September 1974): 492–514; White, “Colonial Revolution and the Communist International, 1919–1924,” *Science and Society* 40, no. 2 (Summer 1976): 173–93; White, “Soviet Russia and the Asian Revolution, 1917–1924,” *Review of International Studies* 10, no. 3 (July 1984): 219–32.
- 46 Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution*, 3:69–271, 3:381–540; Carr, *The Interregnum: 1923–1924* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969), 161–251; Carr, *Socialism in One Country: 1924–1926* (London: MacMillan and Co., 1964); Carr, *Twilight of the Comintern: 1930–1935*.
- 47 Fernando Claudin, *The Communist Movement: From Comintern to Cominform, Part One: The Crisis of the Communist International*, translated by Brian Pearce (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975), 260.
- 48 For two examples, see: Donald Priestland, *The Red Flag: A History of Communism* (New York: Grove Press, 2009), 124; Alastair Kocho-Williams, *Russian and Soviet Diplomacy, 1900–39* (Hounds Mills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 139–41.
- 49 Brandenberger details Stalin’s significant edits, which removed much of the internationalism of the communist movement out of the *Short Course* and instead focused on the building of a strong socialist state, namely the Soviet Union. See David Brandenberger, “The Fate of Interwar Soviet Internationalism: A Case Study of the Editing of Stalin’s 1938 Short Course on the History of the ACP(b),” *Revolutionary Russia* 29, no. 1 (2016): 1–23.
- 50 Silvio Pons, *The Global Revolution: A History of International Communism, 1917–1991*, translated by Allan Cameron (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 118–23; Pons, “Response to ‘Débat autour de *The Global Revolution: A History of International Communism, 1917–1991* de Silvio Pons,’” *Monde(s)* 2, no. 10 (2016): 177–83.
- 51 Roger E. Kanet, “The Comintern and the ‘Negro Question’: Communist Policy in the United States and Africa, 1921–1941,” *Survey* 19, no. 4 (1973): 86–122.
- 52 Harvey Klehr, John Earl Haynes, and Fridrikh Firsov, *The Secret World of American Communism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995); Harvey Klehr, John Earl Haynes, and Kyrill Anderson, *The Soviet World of American Communism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).
- 53 Mark Solomon, *The Cry Was Unity: Communists and African Americans, 1917–36* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1998).

- 54 Jacob Zumoff, *The Communist International and US Communism 1919–1929* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2015), 362. The book's concluding four chapters dwell upon the Negro question.
- 55 Sheridan Johns, *Raising the Red Flag: The International Socialist League and the Communist Party of South Africa, 1914–1932* (Bellville: Mayibuye Books, 1995); Allison Drew, "The New Line in South Africa: Ideology and Perception in a Very Small Communist Party," in *In Search of Revolution: International Communist Parties in the Third Period*, edited by Matthew Worley (London: I.B. Tauris, 2004), 337–59.
- 56 To this end, focusing on "Black October," or the international influence of the Russian Revolution on blacks, is a useful approach, and one encapsulated by the excellent "Black October" roundtable on the Black Perspectives blog of the African American Intellectual History Society website. See <http://www.aaihs.org/tag/black-october/>.
- 57 Manuel Caballero, *Latin America and the Comintern 1919–1943* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).
- 58 Margaret Stevens, *Red International and the Black Caribbean: Communists in New York City, Mexico and the West Indies, 1919–1939* (London: Pluto Press, 2017).
- 59 Evan Smith, *British Communism and the Politics of Race* (Leiden: Brill, 2017).
- 60 Marc Becker, "Mariátegui, the Comintern, and the Indigenous Question in Latin America," *Science and Society* 70, no. 4 (October 2006): 450–79.
- 61 José Carlos Mariátegui, *Seven Interpretive Essays on Peruvian Reality*, translated by Marjory Urquidi (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1971), 188; Harry E.E. Vanden and Marc Becker, eds., *José Carlos Mariátegui: An Anthology* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2011).
- 62 For a particularly useful commentary, see Ilaria Porciani, "On the Uses and Abuses of Nationalism from Below: A Few Notes on Italy," in *Nationalism from Below: Europe in the Long Nineteenth Century*, edited by Maarten Van Ginderachter and Marnix Beyen (Hounds-mills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 73–95.
- 63 Hakim Adi, *Pan-Africanism and Communism: The Communist International, Africa and the Diaspora, 1919–1939* (Trenton: Africa World Press, 2013). Adi has also approached the subject of race and communism by looking at transnational connections and certain labour groups, such as dockworkers in Britain, to add further nuance to the discussion. See Adi, "The Comintern and Black Workers in Britain and France 1919–37," *Immigrants and Minorities* 28, nos. 2/3 (July/November 2010): 224–45.
- 64 Holger Weiss, *Framing a Radical African Atlantic: African American Agency, West African Intellectuals, and the International Trade Union*

- Committee of Negro Workers* (Leiden: Brill, 2014); Weiss, “Between Moscow and the African Atlantic: The Comintern Network of Negro Workers,” *Monde(s)* 2, no. 10 (2016): 89–108.
- 65 Fredrik Petersson, *Willi Munzenberg, the League against Imperialism, and the Comintern, 1925–1933* (New York: Edward Mellen, 2014).
- 66 Serge Wolikow, “The Comintern as a World Network,” in *The Cambridge History of Communism: Vol. 1; World Revolution and Socialism in One Country 1917–1941*, edited by Silvio Pons and Stephen A. Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 212–31.
- 67 John D. Hargreaves, “The Comintern and Anti-Colonialism: New Research Opportunities,” *African Affairs* 92, no. 367 (April 1993): 255–61.
- 68 Alexander Vatlin and Stephen A. Smith, “The Comintern,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Communism*, edited by S.A. Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 196.
- 69 Here we can name only a few indicative studies of these debates. For a good overview of recent studies on British communism with this discussion in mind, see John Newsinger, “Recent Controversies in the History of British Communism,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 41, no. 3 (July 2006): 557–72. For some examples of the orthodox school, see John McIlroy and Alan Campbell, “‘Nina Ponomareva’s Hats’: The New Revisionism, the Communist International, and the Communist Party of Great Britain, 1920–1930,” *Labour/Le Travail* 49 (Spring 2002): 147–87; Harvey Klehr, John Earl Haynes, and Fridrikh Firsov, *The Secret World of American Communism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995). For some important revisionist studies, see Tim Rees and Andrew Thorpe, eds., *International Communism and the Communist International* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998); Matthew Worley, ed., *In Search of Revolution: International Communist Parties in the Third Period* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2004). Finally, for a useful review of the problems with this dichotomy, see Kevin Morgan, “The Trouble with Revisionism: Or Communist History with the History Left In,” *Labour/Le Travail* 63 (Spring 2009), 131–55.
- 70 For example, Drachewych, *The Communist International*. For new unpublished historical work drawing on the Comintern papers, see Christine Elie, “The City and the Reds: Leftism, the Civic Politics of Order, and a Contested Modernity in Montreal, 1929–1947” (PhD diss., Queen’s University, 2015).
- 71 Munck, *Difficult Dialogue*, 91; see also Fernando Claudin, *The Communist Movement: From Comintern to Cominform* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1977), 252.

- 72 See, above all, Robin D.G. Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe: Alabama Communists during the Great Depression* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015).
- 73 Karl Kautsky, *Are the Jews a Race?* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1926). The piece was originally written in 1914.
- 74 Claude McKay has, in particular, drawn new attention. See Gary Edward Holcomb, *Claude McKay: Code Name Sasha. Queer Black Marxism and the Harlem Renaissance* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2007).
- 75 Bryan Palmer and Joan Sangster, “The Distinctive Heritage of 1917: Resuscitating Revolution’s *Longue Durée*,” *Socialist Register* 2017, edited by Leo Panitch and Greg Albo (London: Merlin Press, 2016), 9. Leon Trotsky, on the other hand, continued to believe that black Americans comprised an “oppressed nationality,” although whether this entailed their inherent right to self-determination, i.e., secession, was less clear. For a fascinating contemporary discussion, see Christopher Phelps, ed., Max Shachtman, *Race and Revolution: A Lost Chapter in American Radicalism* (London: Verso, 2003; originally produced, but not published, in 1933). This work was one element in the complicated Trotskyist critiques of Stalinism in the 1930s.
- 76 See James Allen, *The Negro Question in the United States* (New York: International Publishers, 1936), 17.
- 77 For other later echoes of the Black Belt thesis, see Dan Berger with Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, “‘The Struggle Is for Land!’: Race, Territory, and National Liberation,” in *The Hidden 1970s: Histories of Radicalism*, edited by Dan Berger (New Brunswick and London: Rutgers University Press, 2010), 57–76, which explores the American Indian and the Republic of New Afrika movements in the United States, the latter of which imagined a “New Afrika” in North America based upon “the territory the slaves had built and that therefore had been historically home to large populations of black people” (59).
- 78 Stalin, *Marxism and the National Question*.
- 79 For an outstanding account of the notions of historic and non-historic nations, see Charles C. Herod, *The Nation in the History of Marxist Thought: The Concept of Nations with History and Nations without History* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1976).
- 80 Leon Trotsky, *Stalin: An Appraisal of the Man and His Influence*, translated by Charles Malamuth (New York: Stein and Day, 1967), 3.
- 81 John Riddell, “Did Trotsky Retreat from Viewing USSR as a Workers’ State?” 15 November 2017, <https://johnriddell.wordpress.com/2017/11/15/did-trotsky-retreat-from-viewing-ussr-as-a-workers-state/>.

- 82 Trotsky, *Stalin*, 156–7.
- 83 See, for instance, V.I. Lenin, “Itogi diskussii o samoopredelenii,” *PSS*, 30:52–57. The English version is found at Lenin, “The Discussion of Self-Determination Summed Up,” *Collected Works*, 22:353–8.
- 84 The distinction between “nation” and “nationality” did assume some significance in works in the Marxist tradition (the first term pertained to a nation in possession of state or with a realistic possibility of being so, the second to an ethnic minority without any such possibility, perhaps on the grounds that they were insufficiently numerous, or, worse, nomadic). However, the nation/nationality distinction was never developed by either Lenin or Stalin. Engels does broach this issue, but his discussion is heavily influenced by his conviction that some nationalities, as “non-historical,” are slated for extinction. See Davis, *Toward a Marxist Theory of Nationalism*, 6.
- 85 Ibid., 92. According to Francine Hirsch, census takers found 191 different “narodnosti” (people) in the 1926 census; ten years later, under Stalin, the number was reduced to sixty-two. Hirsch, *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005). Our thanks to S.A. Smith for pointing this out.
- 86 Drawing on the able summary of Cheng Chen, *The Prospects for Liberal Nationalism in Post-Leninist States* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007), 57–8.
- 87 For which, see Mariátegui, *Seven Interpretive Essays*, 9–12, 52; Gregory T. Cushman, *Guano and the Opening of the Pacific World: A Global Ecological History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).
- 88 See especially Lorenzo Veracini, *Settler Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).
- 89 The phrase was used by Georgy Dimitrov, then general secretary of the Communist International, at its epochal Seventh World Congress in 1935, where the line change to the Popular Front was unveiled.
- 90 Brigitte Studer, *The Transnational World of the Cominternians*, translated by Dafydd Rees Roberts (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).
- 91 Studer, *The Transnational World of the Cominternians*.
- 92 Lisa A. Kirschenbaum, *International Communism and the Spanish Civil War: Solidarity and Suspicion* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015).
- 93 The journal *Twentieth Century Communism* from Lawrence and Wishart is one to watch for important new work in this vein.
- 94 Susan D. Pennybacker, *From Scottsboro to Munich: Race and Political Culture in 1930s Britain* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2009). Margaret Stevens notes the many horizontal ties among

anti-racism activists and communists in North America, Mexico, and the Caribbean. See Stevens, *Red International and the Black Caribbean: Communists in New York City, Mexico and the West Indies, 1919–1939* (London: Pluto Press, 2017).

- 95 Michael Goebel, *Anti-Imperial Metropolis: Interwar Paris and the Seeds of Third World Nationalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).
- 96 Kirschenbaum, *International Communism and the Spanish Civil War*.
- 97 For a general overview of the intersection of communism and anti-imperialism evident in Cold War nationalist movements, highlighting some connections with the Comintern, see Archie Brown, *The Rise and Fall of Communism* (Toronto: Doubleday Canada, 2009), 332–67.

PART ONE

Orientations

I

“Revolutionary Social Democracy” and the Third International

Lars T. Lih

The Second International marked a period in which the soil was prepared for the broad, mass spread of the movement in a number of countries. The Third International has gathered the fruits of the work of the Second International, discarded its opportunist, social-chauvinist, bourgeois, and petty-bourgeois dross and *has begun to implement* the dictatorship of the proletariat.

Lenin, 1919

The leaders of the Third International liked to emphasize the contrast with the Second International that was broken up for good by the outbreak of the First World War. The old international was reformist; the new one was revolutionary. The old international was Eurocentric; the new one took the global “East” seriously. The old international had exclusively parliamentary parties; the new one had a much broader scope. And so on. By and large, historians of the two internationals have not challenged this framework.

There were indeed many dramatic contrasts between the two internationals, if only because of the equally dramatic contrast between an era of relative peace and an era of global war and revolution. Yet the founders of the Third International had all spent most of their political lives as passionately devoted members of the Second International – or rather, of “revolutionary social democracy,” a name that sounds paradoxical today but at the time was a badge of honour for many. Lenin’s shorthand description of Bolshevism was “the

Russian branch of revolutionary social democracy.” As the left wing of the Second International, revolutionary social democracy constantly polemicized against the right or “opportunistic” wing. In the minds of its Bolshevik founders, the Third International was an attempt to unshackle revolutionary social democracy from what Lenin called its “its opportunist, social-chauvinist, bourgeois, and petty-bourgeois dross.”

Accordingly, a question that needs to be asked is: what are the links between the Third International and prewar revolutionary social democracy? In this chapter, I will survey a wide range of relevant issues and in each case give a brief idea of the link between the new and the old internationals. My overall answer to the question just posed can be summed up as follows. The Third International was an attempt to bring into reality what the Second International was supposed to be – indeed, what the Russian Bolsheviks thought it actually was. The main remedy for curing the ills of the Second International – purging the new international of “opportunism” – was also deeply rooted in the polemical categories of the past. As a consequence, the new international could not long evade the existential dilemma faced by the old one: how to maintain a revolutionary presence in non-revolutionary times.

Our main sources for illustrative documentation are the pronouncements of Bolshevik leaders as activists in both the Second and the Third International, and the writings of Karl Kautsky. As I have shown elsewhere, prior to the war, Kautsky was not only the most prominent and respected spokesman of revolutionary social democracy, but he also played the role of mentor to the Russian Bolsheviks, siding with them on fundamental disputes over revolutionary strategy. On issues that were controversial even within revolutionary social democracy (most notably the right of national self-determination), Lenin and Kautsky formed almost a separate ideological bloc of their own. The main justification for citing Kautsky, however, is that Lenin himself did so on numerous occasions even after 1914. Although he rejected Kautsky personally as a renegade who betrayed his own earlier views, Lenin himself remained defiantly loyal to those views. Lenin never ceased to admire what he called “Kautsky-when-he-was-a-Marxist.”¹

“REVOLUTIONARY SOCIAL DEMOCRACY” VERSUS “MARXISM OF THE SECOND INTERNATIONAL”

A term often found in historical and theoretical writings is “Marxism of the Second International.” The use of this label has the intended

effect of blurring the differences between the left “revolutionary” wing and the right “opportunist” wing. The implicit claim is made that there existed fundamental propositions – often described as “fatalist” or “passive” – to which all Second International Marxists subscribed, but which were rejected by Lenin and other leaders of the Third International.

In a polemic from early 1915, Lenin went out of his way to dispute the utility of any such historical category in advance. He strongly objected to the way the socialist movement in the decades preceding the world war had been characterized by Aleksandr Potresov, a prominent Russian Social Democrat close to the extreme right end of the social democratic spectrum. Looking back after the outbreak of war, Potresov emphasized the era’s “talent for a smooth and cautious advance,” its “pronounced non-adaptability to any break in gradualness and to catastrophic phenomena of any kind,” and its “exceptional isolation within the sphere of [purely] national action.”²

This description of the era of the Second International is completely standard today, but Lenin strongly objected to it, precisely because “the impression is produced that [the socialism of this period] *remained a single whole*, which, generally speaking, was pervaded with gradualism, turned nationalist, was by degrees weaned away from breaks in gradualness and from catastrophes” (emphasis added). According to Lenin, “in reality, this could not have happened,” since class antagonisms were growing rapidly throughout the same period. As a result, “none, literally not one, of the leading capitalist countries of Europe was spared the struggle between the two mutually opposed currents” within the socialist movement.³ Lenin makes no claim to be the first to grasp the danger of opportunism. On the contrary: “There is hardly a single Marxist of note who has not recognized many times and on various occasions that the opportunists are in fact a non-proletarian element hostile to the socialist revolution.”⁴

In this proto-historiographical discussion, Potresov does not yet employ the term “Marxism of the Second International,” but he reproduces its special content when he talks about an all-pervading atmosphere of gradualism and rejection of revolutionary “catastrophes.” Similarly, Lenin is clearly talking about revolutionary social democracy, the foe of reformist opportunism in each European country. As our epigraph from 1919 illustrates, Lenin never renounced his sense of continuity with revolutionary social democracy.

AN INTERNATIONAL PURGED OF OPPORTUNISM

The project of creating a new, opportunist-free Third International arose in Lenin's mind in August and September 1914 as an immediate reaction to what he considered to be the betrayal of the European social democratic parties that supported their respective governments. The rapidity of Lenin's reaction was possible because he was dealing with very familiar material, including the concept of opportunism and its threat to the integrity of the international, a specific cast of socialist activists labelled as opportunists and revolutionary social democrats, and even the idea of purging opportunism as a prescription for political health. The only thing really new was a special category for those who renounced opportunism in words but not in deeds (for the most part, former revolutionary social democrats who refused to call for a split) – a category that was baptized *kautskianstvo* in honor of Karl Kautsky, the iconic figure of this new form of opportunism.

The lesson Lenin drew from the official parties' support for the war was not the existence of a strong opportunist wing in the Second International. He knew that already. What surprised and shocked him was the revelation of just how powerful opportunism had become. His full explanation of the collapse of the Second International went something like this: all during the history of the Second International, there has been a fight between revolutionary social democracy and opportunism. All prominent Marxists realized that opportunism was a strong and growing internal threat to the integrity of social democratic parties. Kautsky in particular was one of the foremost fighters against opportunism, and his analyses remain useful today. But very few realized just how far the rot had gone until the crisis of 1914 revealed it. The "social chauvinism" and "social patriotism" now current is merely the present-day expression of this age-old opportunism. Opportunism is a malignant cancer that has destroyed the official parties of the Second International, but its triumph will not be long-lived. The immediate task of those who remain loyal to revolutionary social democracy is to found a new, opportunism-free international.

The idea of purifying the international by throwing out the opportunists and leaving only the revolutionary social democrats was not a new one in 1914. A few years earlier, in a review of Kautsky's 1909 book *Road to Power*, Bolshevik leader Grigory Zinoviev wrote:

The international situation is becoming extraordinarily tense, the dense ball of capitalist society's contradictions is becoming ever

more entangled, the sharpness of class antagonisms is growing. Social Democracy, in Kautsky's opinion, must conduct a purge of its own ranks, it must free itself from petty-bourgeois elements, it must stand out more sharply than ever before against the politics of blocs and agreements with the bourgeoisie – especially now, when the description of the bourgeoisie as “one reactionary mass” is finding real confirmation.⁵

After the outbreak of the war and even after the revolution, Lenin continued to give explicit credit to Kautsky for his understanding of the dangers of opportunism. In 1915, he writes that “this same Kautsky wrote 15 years ago, at the beginning of the Bernstein affair, that if opportunism changed from a mood to a tendency, a split would be on the order of the day.”⁶ In 1916, he writes that “we ask the reader not to forget that Kautsky up to 1909, up to his excellent book *Road to Power*, was a foe of opportunism, to whose defense he turned only in 1910–11, and completely decisively only in 1914–16.”⁷ In 1920, he writes that “the views held by Kautsky and his like are a complete renunciation of the very same revolutionary principles of Marxism which he championed for decades, especially in his struggle against socialist opportunism (Bernstein, Millerand, Hyndman, Gompers, etc.).”⁸ Lenin even gives credit to Kautsky for the idea of changing the name of the party from “social democratic” to “communist.”⁹

A NEW ERA OF GLOBAL WAR AND REVOLUTION

In 1922, Bolshevik leader Lev Kamenev published an extensive collection of his prewar articles. Most of the articles deal with domestic Russian politics, but at the end of the book there is a short section of five articles that take up international issues. Kamenev introduced this section with the following comment: “The goal of reprinting is to show that even in this area the Bolsheviks had before the war already set out the basic points that we needed only to develop further during the war and after it. Of course, at that time we could only *set out* these points, only *feel them out*.”¹⁰

Kamenev's words offer a good formula for understanding the link between the two internationals, particularly in the area of the new international's global scenario: the basic points were already there, but they became much more focused and foundational during the following years of revolution. Those “basic points” were not original with the Bolshevik leaders, nor did they ever make that claim.

Especially in the years 1914–1916, Lenin adapted a stance I have described as “aggressive unoriginality.”¹¹ For example, he insisted at the top of his voice that “long before the war, all Marxists, all socialists were agreed that a European war would create a revolutionary situation … So, the expectation of a revolutionary situation in Europe was not an infatuation of the Bolsheviks, but the *general opinion* of all Marxists.”¹² Let us review some of the points accepted by “all Marxists” – that is, the revolutionary social democratic wing of the Second International.

IMPERIALISM

Because Lenin’s 1916 book *Imperialism* is in large part directed against Kautsky’s wartime writings, many readers have greatly exaggerated Lenin’s break with the outlook of the Second International. In reality, Lenin’s basic argument was not – and was not meant to be – original. *Imperialism* should be considered as one more example of Lenin attacking Kautsky-now in favour of Kautsky-then.

When we turn to Kautsky’s prewar writings on imperialism, we find a consistent vision of the current situation in Western Europe. This vision arose out of his polemics against the “opportunist” claim that class antagonisms were melting away. Just the opposite, argued Kautsky, class antagonisms were becoming sharper: cartelization at home and colonial policies abroad showed that capitalism was already going through its final phase. Socialist revolution was thus firmly on the agenda: “The further cartels develop and spread, the clearer the proof that the capitalist mode of production has passed beyond the stage when it was the most powerful agent for the development of the productive forces, and that it is ever more hindering this development and creating ever more unbearable conditions … Socialism has already become an economic necessity today, only power determines when it will come.”¹³

When Lenin attacked Kautsky’s more recent theory of “ultra-imperialism” in 1916, he was at the same time defending the standard outlook of prewar revolutionary social democracy. The American socialist Morris Hillquit set forth the standard view:

The Socialists [as opposed to bourgeois pacifists] realize that under existing conditions wars are inevitable. *The Socialists assert that wars are bound to become more frequent and violent*

*as the capitalist system approaches its climax ... The clash might have come somewhat earlier. It might have been delayed somewhat. But in the long run it was inevitable. It is idle to place the blame for the monstrous crime on any particular nation or government, to seek the aggressor. Capitalism has made this war, and all the nations are the victims.*¹⁴

If contemporary wars were imperialist, then “defense of the fatherland against aggression” was no longer a valid rationale for supporting a wartime government. Lenin himself documented the presence of this argument in revolutionary social democracy:

Up to the 1914–1916 war, Karl Kautsky was a Marxist, and many of his major writings and statements will always remain models of Marxism. On August 26, 1910, he wrote in *Die Neue Zeit*, in reference to the imminent war: ‘In war between Germany and England the issue is not democracy, but world domination, that is, exploitation of the world. That is not an issue on which Social-Democrats can side with the exploiters of their nation.’ There you have an excellent Marxist formulation, one that fully coincides with our own and fully exposes the *present-day* Kautsky, who has turned from Marxism to defense of social-chauvinism.¹⁵

Prewar socialists also used imperialism and colonial exploitation as a way of explaining why, for example, the British working class was not revolutionary. As Kautsky observed in 1906, in England, as opposed to Russia or India, capitalist exploitation was “a means of enriching the country, of accumulating a perpetually growing booty that was won through plundering the whole world. Even the propertyless classes benefit in many ways from this plunder.”¹⁶

We may therefore conclude that a cluster of ideas about imperialism foundational to the Third International had solid roots in revolutionary social democracy. Among these ideas are the following claims: Western Europe was ripe for socialist revolution and socialist transformation; imperialism would inevitably cause wars, so that contemporary European wars were bound to be imperialistic rather than justifiably defensive; and imperialism and colonial exploitation provide explanations for the non-revolutionary outlook of much of the European working class.

“REVOLUTIONARY ASIA”

The Third International had a global perspective from the very beginning, as shown by the 1920 Congress of the Peoples of the East in Baku and many debates at early congresses. The Third International’s emphasis on the global “East” (meaning both East Asia and the Islamic world), and its wager on colonial rebellions and national liberation movements, also had their roots in revolutionary social democracy. As Kautsky remarked in *Road to Power*, “Today, the battles in the liberation struggle of labouring and exploited humanity are being fought not only at the Spree River and the Seine, but also at the Hudson and Mississippi, at the Neva and the Dardanelles, at the Ganges and the Hoangho.”¹⁷

Kautsky in particular stressed that the wars and revolutions now shaking the world did not proceed along their own tracks in isolation, but were profoundly affected in every way by global interaction. He sets out with clarity the logic of what was later termed “uneven and combined development,” or, in Kautsky’s words, “the conjuncture of the most advanced with the most backward forms of societies and states ... The backward nations have since time immemorial learned from the more advanced, and they have often therefore been capable of leaping with one bound over several stages of development which had been climbed wearily by their predecessors.”¹⁸

The impact of these new ideas on the Bolshevik leaders can be seen in articles published immediately before the war by Kamenev. As we have seen, Kamenev conceded later that the Bolsheviks were at this time only feeling their way toward a global perspective, given their understandable focus on Russian affairs. Nevertheless, Kamenev forcefully directed his readers’ attention to the independence movement in the colonies and semi-colonies. In an article entitled “Revolution in the East,” Kamenev announced, “Asia has just entered into a long period of revolutionary transformations.”¹⁹ National independence movements against both European domination and parasitic local elites – Kamenev names “new Turkey,” “new Persia,” “new China,” India, and Egypt – may have represented a familiar type of revolution, but it was one that was taking place in a fundamentally new context:

The revolution of the nineteenth century is a bourgeois-democratic and national revolution, the revolution of the

twentieth century is a proletarian and international revolution ... The European tasks facing Asia are principally the same [as those facing the European revolutions of the nineteenth century,] but they will be solved in a fundamentally altered environment ... Revolutionary Asia sees alongside of it a European society that is vitally interested in its fate, a society split into two irreconcilable camps, a society that itself is living in the prospect of its own socialist revolution ... Revolutionary Asia will find in Europe not only enemies, but also allies who have an interest in its progress.²⁰

“Revolutionary Asia” and the socialist proletariat are natural allies, but not because there is anything socialist about the Asian revolutions. Despite the influence of European socialist ideas on the Asian intellectuals, “the movement of the Asian democrats contains not a grain of socialism.” Kamenev sums up their program concisely: “overthrow of the old power [*vlast*], full rule by the people [*narodovlastie*], national independence.” In the new context of global interaction and revolutionary contagion, however, these national liberation movements would have a huge impact directly on Europe.

Kamenev quotes the Austrian social democrat Otto Bauer: “The whole European economy is tied in the closest possible fashion with the East ... The whole European system of states stands and falls with its domination over the Eastern countries.”²¹ This is why (Kamenev asserts perhaps over-optimistically) the English, French, and German workers follow Asian events with such attention: “the socialist proletariat of Europe has long awaited the moment when the foundations of reaction in Asia begin to totter in order to strike their own decisive blow in Europe.”²²

The Third International’s newly intense focus on revolutionary forces in the East quickly gave rise to a series of practical dilemmas. First and foremost, what attitude should communist parties take toward “bourgeois” national liberation movements? This perennial dilemma is foreshadowed by Kautsky’s response in 1907 to a group of Iranian social democrats who were unsure about the propriety of social democratic participation in the struggle against foreign capitalism.²³ Kautsky replied that “socialist fighters cannot adopt an exclusively passive attitude towards the revolution and remain with their arms folded. And if the country is not sufficiently developed to have a modern proletariat, then only a [pre-socialist] democratic movement

against foreign domination movement provides the possibility for socialists to participate in the revolutionary struggle.”²⁴

Kautsky went on to advise his Iranian correspondents that the social democrats may have to participate “as simple democrats in the ranks of bourgeois and petit-bourgeois democrats.” They nevertheless will always have a wider perspective, since for them “the victory of democracy is not the end of political struggle; rather, it is the beginning of the new unknown struggle which was practically impossible under the absolutist regime.” This new struggle required not only political freedom but national independence. The fight of social democracy against capitalism in countries like Iran may not be able to put socialist revolution on the immediate agenda, but nevertheless such a struggle will “weaken European capitalism and bestow greater strength on the European proletariat … Persia and Turkey, by struggling for their own liberation, also fight for the liberation of the world proletariat.” In 1909, Kautsky stressed once again that the anti-colonial rebels were often supporters of capitalism, but “this does not in any way alter the fact that they are weakening European capitalism and its governments and introducing an element of political unrest into the whole world.”²⁵

Beyond this kind of political calculation lay a new ethical attitude of anti-racism, anti-white-condescension, and a recognition of equality on a global scale. This new attitude was eloquently expressed by Kautsky in a challenge to some of his fellow socialists:

The colonial policy of imperialism is based on the assumption that only the peoples possessed of European civilization are capable of independent development. The men of other races are considered children, idiots, or beasts of burden, according to the degree of unfriendliness with which one treats them; in any case as beings having a lower level of development, who can be directed as one wishes. Even socialists proceed on this assumption as soon as they want to pursue a policy of colonial expansion, an ethical one, of course. But reality soon teaches them that our party’s tenet that all men are equal is no mere figure of speech, but a very real force.²⁶

“HEGEMONY”: PROLETARIAN LEADERSHIP OF THE PEASANTRY

The Bolsheviks thought of themselves as the Russian branch of revolutionary social democracy, and this feeling was dramatically

confirmed in 1906 when Kautsky wrote an eloquent article containing a de facto endorsement of what the Bolsheviks called “hegemony.” When used by the Bolsheviks, “hegemony” meant a revolutionary strategy for Russia that aimed at class leadership of the revolutionary peasantry by the socialist proletariat – even though there was no expectation that the peasantry did or even could support socialist goals. As Kautsky wrote, “a solid community of interest [*Interessengemeinschaft*] exists only between the proletariat and the peasantry. This community of interest must furnish the basis of the whole revolutionary tactic of Russian Social Democracy.”²⁷

Bolshevik leaders such as Lenin and Joseph Stalin, and other Russian revolutionary social democrats such as Lev Trotsky, enthusiastically endorsed Kautsky’s article as an expression of their own views. Lenin wrote that Kautsky’s article was “a brilliant vindication of the *fundamental principles* of Bolshevik tactics ... Kautsky’s analysis satisfies us completely.”²⁸ After the revolution, these same Bolshevik leaders stressed the continuity of the prewar hegemony scenario with their post-1917 strategy in the civil war and after.

For our purposes, another continuity is important: the Russian hegemony scenario provided a template for a global revolutionary strategy. Looking back in the 1920s, Nikolai Bukharin made these comments about the post-revolutionary heritage of the pre-revolutionary dispute between Bolsheviks and Mensheviks – in other words, between Russian “revolutionary Social Democrats” and Russian “opportunists”:

The arguments among us [Russian Social Democrats before the war], as is known, boiled down to a considerable degree to the question of the *worker-peasant bloc*, of an alliance *between the working class* and the peasantry, and of the *hegemony* of the proletariat in this “alliance” or bloc.” Now, in the eighth year of our revolution and our dictatorship, we clearly see the *enormity* of this problem, which for the first time was distinctly outlined by Vladimir Ilich [Lenin] and which later became one of the cornerstones both of the theoretical and practical structure of Bolshevism. Only at the present time has this question come up in all its enormous dimensions.

One aspect of these “enormous dimensions” was the *smychka* in Soviet Russia itself, that is, the imperative of maintaining a “link” between the Russian proletariat and peasantry. But Bukharin went

on to stress the vital importance of proletarian leadership of the peasantry on a global scale: “The greatest part of France is *in Africa*, the greatest part of England is *in Asia*, etc. What will the English proletariat do after their victory, if they do not receive the support and sympathy of the Indian and Egyptian peasants? If it does not lead them into the fight against capitalism? If they do not win their sympathy and their support? If it does not establish its *hegemony*, its *leadership* over this enormous mass of humanity?”²⁹

At the Baku Congress in late 1920, the practical consequences of what might be called global hegemony were spelled out. The main speaker on this question at Baku was Béla Kun, the leader of the Hungarian soviet revolution. Appropriately enough, a symbol of a failed socialist revolution in Europe set forth the hope for revolutionary success in the East. Although Kun granted that a soviet revolution in the East would lead to a state power based on the peasantry rather than the proletariat, soviet power would still be defined by the exclusion of social and economic elites. In contrast, the “false slogans” of the soviet system’s rival, parliamentary democracy, were just a screen “to maintain the power of the sultans, shahs, emirs, pashas, and beys.”³⁰

The revolutionary social democratic scenario of proletarian hegemony thus remained part and parcel of the idea of soviet power, even when applied to countries at a low level of economic development: “It is self-evident that where a factory exists, where there are some better-educated and experienced industrial workers, even if only in small numbers, these workers will be the leaders of the rural poor.”³¹ As in Russia, the idea of soviet power was directly connected to specific policies that constituted a radical response to a national crisis. “The peasants find themselves in an absolutely unbearable situation of utter ruin, chronic hunger, and endless indebtedness, obliged to work for landlords, tribute collectors, and usurers.”³² The only effective response was extreme agrarian redistribution, cancellation of debts, and destruction of the power of traditional and colonial elites.

The Third International could also point to Soviet Russia as an inspiring example of hegemony in practice. “Welded together in soviets, these [Russian] peasants are now defending the land they took from the landlords and the power they took from the exploiters.” Taxes are still collected, not by “venal bloodsucking officials but by the peasants’ soviets.”³³

The heart of the idea of soviet power in the East was revealed to be the hegemony scenario of revolutionary social democracy: a bigger

and better 1905 revolution, a vast *narodnaia revoliutsiia* leading to a revolutionary government that would undertake a radical transformation of the country in the people’s interest. The analogy with the 1905 revolution was therefore strongly emphasized by the Bolshevik spokesmen at Baku.

SELF-IMAGE OF THE THIRD INTERNATIONAL

The idealized self-image of the Second International found its most exalted expression in the Extraordinary International Socialist Congress that met in Basel in November 1912. The congress was called at very short notice in order to allow Europe’s socialist proletariat to make its voice heard against Great Power intervention in the armed conflict that had just broken out in the Balkans. The manifesto issued by the congress pledged Europe’s social democratic parties to use the outbreak of war to engage in revolutionary action or at least work in that direction. For Lenin, the Basel Manifesto was a summary of what the Second International was all about:

The Basel Manifesto sums up the vast amount of propaganda and agitation material of the entire epoch of the Second International, namely, the period between 1889 and 1914. This Manifesto *summarizes*, without any exaggeration, *millions upon millions* of leaflets, press articles, books, and speeches by socialists of all lands. To declare this Manifesto erroneous means declaring the entire Second International erroneous, the work done in decades and decades by all Social-Democratic parties. To brush aside the Basel Manifesto means brushing aside the entire history of socialism. The Basel Manifesto says nothing unusual or *out of the ordinary*.³⁴

In Lenin’s mind, it was he who remained loyal to the true outlook of the Second International at its best, and *not* the opportunist-turned-social-patriots who reneged on the solemn commitments undertaken at Basel. The Basel Manifesto is worthy of close analysis, but for now we will focus on the picture it paints of the Second International itself: “Because the proletarians of all countries have risen simultaneously in a struggle against imperialism, and because each section of the international has opposed to the government of its own country the resistance of the proletariat and has

mobilized the public opinion of its nation against all bellicose desires, there has resulted a splendid cooperation among the workers of all countries that has so far contributed a great deal toward saving the threatened peace of the world.”³⁵ The “unanimity” in the socialist war against war allowed the international to “assign a particular task to each socialist party.” Looking ahead, the manifesto expressed the hope that, regardless of what may be the outcome of the crisis, the contacts between proletarian parties would grow stronger.

Kamenev was a delegate to the Basel Congress and helped draft the text of the revolution. He was much impressed (as were many other observers) by the unanimity and determination of the stand against war. He was proud of the way that the resolution set out very specific tasks to “the national units of the international army of the socialist proletariat.” The Asian revolutions gave the international even more of a global presence: “The International Socialist Bureau has become almost the official institution to which the democrats of Asia direct their protests against the violently repressive actions of the European states.”³⁶

A very exalted view of the international manifests itself throughout Kamenev’s articles. For him, a resolution passed by an international social democratic congress was a very serious affair. He reacted with indignation to a cynical remark by the French provocateur Gustave Hervé, who at this time (1912) was preaching the necessity of a bloc between socialists and liberals. But what about the resolution of the Amsterdam congress (1904) prohibiting such blocs? Not a problem, replied Hervé – “if a bloc (a long-lasting alliance) contradicts the bible, then call it a coalition or a cartel, you silly people.” Kamenev somewhat primly remarks that “this tone of voice in relation to the mandates of international socialist congresses speaks for itself.”³⁷

The Bolsheviks’ high and unrealistic expectations for international solidarity meant that they were setting themselves up for a huge disappointment. As Kamenev bitterly remarked in 1922: “The Second International betrayed the cause of the Asiatic and all other colonial revolutions in the same way as it betrayed the workers of Europe.”³⁸ The mission of the Third International was thus to become in actual fact what the Second International had been only in the Bolsheviks’ exalted dreams.

RUSSIA’S REVOLUTIONARY PROWESS

In the Second and Third Internationals, respectively, a single party dominated the rest in terms of prestige and organizational clout: the German Social Democratic Party (SPD) in the Second International, and the Russian Communist Party in the Third. Many of the reasons for Russia’s dominance are familiar and straightforward: the heroic experience of revolution and civil war, control of the Soviet state and therefore of financial resources. Our inquiry here suggests another underappreciated cause of Russia’s dominance: Russia already had a privileged position in the world picture of revolutionary social democracy.

This privileged position was not at all a result of the pride and ambition of Russian social democrats – rather the reverse. European social democrats all admired the fight of the Russian people and proletariat against the tsar. The picture of Russia that emerges from Kautsky’s extensive writings is a country whose revolutionary prowess had vast potential influence on socialist revolution in Western Europe, national revolution in Eastern Europe, and national liberation movements in “the Orient.”

In 1902, Kautsky wrote an article for Lenin’s underground newspaper *Iskra* entitled “Slavs and Revolution” which asserted that “the revolutionary center is moving from the West to the East.” The “revolutionizing of minds” among the Russian people will lead to “great deeds that cannot fail to influence Western Europe” and the blood of Russian revolutionary martyrs will “fertilize the shoots of social revolution throughout the entire civilized world.”³⁹ Lenin was so fond of this article that he read lengthy excerpts of it in 1920 at the public celebration of his fiftieth birthday. Soon afterwards, he included these excerpts in his pamphlet *Left-Wing Communism*, commenting, “How well Karl Kautsky wrote eighteen years ago!”⁴⁰

Reading prewar articles by Bolshevik leaders, we see that the Bolsheviks already gave Russia a privileged place in the system of global revolutionary interaction. In 1913, Stalin commented that “Russia is situated between Europe and Asia, between Austria and China. The growth of democracy in Asia is inevitable. The growth of imperialism in Europe is not fortuitous.”⁴¹ Kamenev explained the idea in more concrete detail. The Russian revolution of 1905 not only had a powerful impact on the Western European social democratic

movement, but it also was the “immediate impulse” to the new awakening now taking place in Persia, Turkey, India, and China:

The relations that have been created in Europe and Asia in the second decade of the twentieth century are such that the proletariat of Russia is at the center of international events. Much depends on what this proletariat says – its voice is listened to with great attention not only in proletarian Europe [but] in revolutionizing Asia ... Revolution in Russia: this is the Achilles' heel of the whole system of relations in Europe and Asia. Only a new revolution in Russia can begin a new period of success for the proletarian cause in Europe and the democratic cause in Asia ... In the events that are now approaching, Russia is predestined to play a decisive role. It is the knot at which all the threads of the future meet.⁴²

There is thus strong continuity between the privileged position of Russia in the world picture of revolutionary social democracy and the country's privileged position in the new international. The leaders of the Third International had no trouble in asserting an objective community of interest between a Soviet Union hostile to the capitalist West and anti-colonial forces around the world. As Karl Radek said at Baku, “we are bound to you by destiny.”⁴³

CAMPAIGNISM

The Second International was known in its time for its vast, innovative array of agitation techniques: an impressively extensive socialist press, rallies, face-to-face conversations, petitions, electoral campaigns, and speeches in the legislature, as well as the many choral societies, hiking clubs, and the like that Vernon Lidtke has described as “the alternative culture.”⁴⁴ My name for the overall strategy incarnated by these practices is “campaignism” or “the permanent campaign.”⁴⁵ Campaignism was the common property of both wings of the Second International.

A major part of the historical significance of the Third International is that it transmitted the institutional DNA that lay behind campaignism to the rest of the world. We can only touch on this vast topic here. The link between the two internationals can be seen by two descriptions of the permanent campaign, one by Ferdinand Lassalle in the

1860s and the other by Lenin in 1920. Lassalle’s overlooked historical importance results from his great idea of transforming agitation campaigns from an ad hoc tool to a permanent ongoing institution and to envision a new type of party which would make this permanent campaign its central activity. Lassalle exhorts socialist activists to:

Found and publish newspapers, to make this demand [universal suffrage] daily and to prove the reasons for it from the state of society. With the same funds circulate pamphlets for the same purpose. Pay agents out of the Union’s funds to carry this insight into every corner of the country, to thrill the heart of every worker, every house-servant, every farm-laborer, with this cry ... Propagate this cry in every workshop, every village, every hut. May the workers of the towns let their higher insight and education overflow on to the workers of the country. Debate, discuss, everywhere, every day without pausing, without ending.⁴⁶

Compare Lassalle’s vision to these words of Lenin (from *Left-Wing Communism*, his pamphlet written in 1920 for the Second Congress of the Third International):

The Communist Parties must issue their slogans; real proletarians, with the help of the unorganized and downtrodden poor, should scatter and distribute leaflets, canvass workers’ houses and the cottage of the rural proletarians and peasants in the remote villages ... they should go into casual meetings where the common people gather, and talk to the people, not in scientific (and not in very parliamentary) language, they should not at all strive to “get seats” in parliament, but should everywhere strive to rouse the minds of the masses and to draw them into the struggle, to catch the bourgeois on their own statements, to utilize the apparatus they have set up, the elections they have appointed, the appeals to the country they have made, and to tell the people what Bolshevism is in a way that has never been possible (under bourgeois rule) outside of election times.⁴⁷

We can make the link more concrete by comparing how the two internationals stage-managed international congresses as a way of “rousing the mind of the masses.” Kevin J. Callahan’s *Demonstration Culture* is an excellent introduction to the campaigns of the Second

International.⁴⁸ He describes in detail the stage-managing of the special Basel Congress in November 1912. The congress was preceded by mass demonstrations throughout Europe culminating in Europe-wide synchronized rallies on 17 November. The congress opened with a huge demonstration inside and out of the Basel Cathedral. “Inside the cathedral, thousands of candles flickered in the wind, providing light to the dim and vast open spaces of the church. The church bells chimed for fifteen minutes, while militants methodically placed their red flags of the International in the nave of the cathedral … It was a sacred celebration of the International’s highest aspirations.”⁴⁹

The records of the Second Congress of the Third International (summer 1920), supplemented by John Riddell’s interviews with long-lived participants, show how much the communists learned from their predecessors about the art of revolutionary festivals.⁵⁰ The following features of the Second Congress stand out:

- the location of the congress in civil-war Moscow was part of its message to delegates
- the delegates were all housed in one hotel, thus allowing a great deal of sociability
- the delegates addressed worker meetings, participated in volunteer activities, mass demonstrations, dramatic performances, and even a sculpture contest
- the “ritual of reception” was especially elaborate: delegates travelled to Petrograd (now St Petersburg), took a streetcar to the Smolny Institute with Mikhail Kalinin at the wheel, and were greeted by a children’s choir
- Kalinin’s inaugural speech impressed upon delegates the sacred status of the Smolny Institute as a birthplace of the revolution
- a mass demonstration took place with thousands of worker participants, culminating in a piece of mass theater, the *Spectacle of Two Worlds*. One delegate remembered that “it was like a dream. As the sailors’ armored car drove up, we delegates stood, shouting, waving our arms, so enthusiastic we were quite overcome.”⁵¹
- in the first session of the congress – in a formerly tsarist palace now named for the Bolshevik martyr Moisei Uritsky – delegates sang *The Internationale* and rose to honour fallen comrades while an orchestra played a funeral march
- Zinoviev’s opening speech stressed how the present congress revealed the vast growth and global reach of the communist movement

- Lenin’s opening speech was greeted in a manner befitting a socialist hero (“all present rise and applaud. The speaker tries to speak, but the applause and cheers in every language continue. The ovation continues at length”)⁵²
- many greetings to the congress were read aloud during the proceedings
- many appeals for international solidarity were issued
- the delegates laid a wreath on a grave of fighters for the revolution and went to a “large international rally” to lay the cornerstone for a monument to Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht
- the congress reached a climax in its activities by issuing a long and impressive manifesto, penned by Trotsky

All of these features have direct counterparts in the congresses of the Second International, as Callahan’s account shows. These pompous pageants remained a crucial part of communist political culture right through the twentieth century. But there was one striking difference between the practices of the prewar and postwar internationals. The demonstrations engineered by prewar socialist leaders were meant to establish a legitimate claim to participate in a public space controlled by others. In Russia in 1920, the organizers of the congress themselves controlled the public space. On the one hand, this control allowed ever-more grandiose examples of campaignism such as the *Spectacle of Two Worlds*. On the other hand, the genuine drama of actual contestation with independent forces was absent. This contrast in demonstration culture is part and parcel of a larger contrast in the status of political freedom – a vital topic but one that would take us too far afield to be examined here.

CONCLUSION

We have examined links between prewar revolutionary social democracy and the Third International that allow us to see the new international as the continuation of an earlier project. Obviously, this continuity in no way implies that the Third International was simply a rebranded copy of the Second International. On the contrary: the Second International represented an uneasy coexistence of revolutionary social democracy and opportunism, while the Third International began with a purge of opportunism and “centrists.” The resulting atmosphere of purge and denunciation never fully left the new international.

Furthermore, the world outlook of prewar revolutionary social democracy was in a state of flux in the decade before October, while the founding of the Third International in 1919 provided the starting place and a framework for development in new and unexpected directions. Although the founders and top leaders of the Third International were all revolutionary social democrats of long standing, the percentage of people with similar prewar backgrounds was drastically reduced the further down and the further out we go in the organization. Ways of thinking that were second nature to the leaders were often meaningless to people on the ground.

This dynamic was strengthened by a gradual shift in the Third International's center of gravity from West to East. In his opening speech at the Baku Congress, Grigory Zinoviev talked about two streams of world revolution. One stream – “fast, impetuous and strong” – was found in Europe, while the other stream – “not yet strong enough ... taking a zigzag course” – was the movement of oppressed nationalities in the East.⁵³ Zinoviev spoke just at the moment when the relative strength of the two streams had begun to reverse itself. Looking back many years later, we see that while communism never came to power in Western Europe, it controlled the destiny of mighty states in the East (using this term in its widest, non-geographical sense).

Although the new international continued to evolve in unexpected ways, not all of this evolution moved away from the original model of revolutionary social democracy. The Third International was founded in the secure confidence that Europe was in the throes of a revolutionary situation that would soon give rise to socialist revolutions in Europe. This expectation was almost immediately challenged, and short-term hopes for revolution in Europe began gradually but inexorably to fade away. In Europe, the parties of the Third International found themselves back in a situation very much like the one faced by the socialist parties before the war: a revolutionary party in a non-revolutionary situation.

Comments by Trotsky at the Fourth Congress in 1922 reveal the required adjustment. He noted that “during the period preparatory to the revolution [that is, a period no longer considered a direct revolutionary situation] ... it is perfectly evident that the class life of the proletariat is not suspended.” Communist parties still had to “fight for influence over the majority of the working class” by working in good faith for partial improvements in the life of the workers. Thus

the parties faced the same old dilemma of balancing work for concrete reforms with a continuing commitment to revolutionary goals.

Trotsky insisted that “the minds of all Communists must be completely purged of reformist prejudices, in accordance with which the party is regarded as a political parliamentary organization of the proletariat, and nothing more. The Communist Party is the organization of the proletarian vanguard for the ideological fructification of the worker movement and the assumption of leadership in all spheres.”⁵⁴ This language hid a return to the old model of party-led campaignism, which, of course, had never restricted itself to being merely the reflection of a “political parliamentary organization.”

The hand-off from revolutionary social democracy to the Third International was a highly complex process with many conceptual, organizational, and political strands. Our survey of a number of significant links between the two revolutionary projects only hints at the complexity. The main aim of this chapter has been to ground the aims of the founders of the new international in their own lived experience as revolutionary social democrats.

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NOTES

Epigraph from V. I. Lenin, “Tretiĭ internatsional i ego mesto v istorii,” *Polnoe Sobranie Sochinenii (PSS)* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel’stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1963), 38:303.

- 1 For more detail on the relation between Lenin and Kautsky, see Lars T. Lih, “A New Era of War and Revolution”: Lenin, Kautsky, Hegel and the Outbreak of World War I,” in *Cataclysm 1914: The First World War and the Making of Modern World Politics*, edited by Alexander Anievas (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 366–412.
- 2 Lenin, *PSS*, 26:147.
- 3 Ibid., 148.

- ⁴ Ibid., 113.
- ⁵ Lars T. Lih, “A Perfectly Ordinary, Highly Instructive Document” (full translation and commentary on G. Zinoviev’s 1910 review of K. Kautsky’s *Road to Power*), *Weekly Worker*, 17 December 2015, <http://weekly-worker.co.uk/worker/1087/a-perfectly-ordinary-highly-instructive-document/>.
- ⁶ Lenin, *PSS*, 26:102.
- ⁷ Ibid., 25:259.
- ⁸ Ibid., 27:306–7.
- ⁹ Ibid., 26:95.
- ¹⁰ Lev Kamenev, *Mezhdu dvumia revoliutsiami* (Moscow: Tsentrpoligraf, 2003), 653 (Kamenev’s emphasis).
- ¹¹ Lars T. Lih, “Lenin’s Aggressive Unoriginality, 1914–1916,” *Socialist Studies: The Journal of the Society for Socialist Studies* 5, no. 2 (Fall 2009), 90–112.
- ¹² Lenin, *PSS*, 37:301. In another example, Lenin gives his definition of a “revolutionary situation” modelled closely on the one given by Kautsky in *Road to Power* and comments: “such are the Marxist views on revolution, views that have been developed many, many times, have been accepted as indisputable by all Marxists, and, for us Russians, were corroborated in a particularly striking fashion by the experience of 1905.” Ibid., 26:219.
- ¹³ Karl Kautsky, *Socialism and Colonial Policy*, 1907, Marxists Internet Archive, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/kautsky/1907/colonial/index.htm>.
- ¹⁴ Hillquit’s comments (emphasis his) are cited by the American socialist William Walling in his informative 1915 book *Socialists and the War*. Although Hillquit made these statements in 1914–1915, Walling affirms that “if we wish to know what the Socialist thought on war was becoming immediately before the present struggle, we must look to Kautsky and [Otto] Bauer. If we wish to know what it *actually was*, we must look to Hillquit.” Walling, *Socialists and the War* (New York: H. Holt and Co., 1915], 21.
- ¹⁵ Lenin, *PSS*, 23:35.
- ¹⁶ Richard Day and Daniel Gaido, eds., *Witnesses to Permanent Revolution: The Documentary Record* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 631.
- ¹⁷ Karl Kautsky, *The Road to Power: Political Reflections on Growing into the Revolution*, translated by Raymond Meyer, edited by John Kautsky (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1996 [1909]), 88–91.
- ¹⁸ Kautsky, *Socialism and Colonial Policy*; see also Day and Gaido, *Witnesses*, 395–7.

- 19 Kamenev, *Mezhdu*, 660–6.
- 20 Ibid.
- 21 Otto Bauer is often mentioned by Lenin after 1914 as one of the main spokesmen for prewar revolutionary social democracy; for writings by Bauer on international relations, see Richard Day and Daniel Gaido, eds., *Discovering Imperialism: Social Democracy to World War I* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2012).
- 22 Kamenev, *Mezhdu*, 660–6.
- 23 “The Left in Iran, 1905–1940,” *Revolutionary History* 10, no. 2 (2010, special issue), 123–8.
- 24 Kautsky, *Road to Power*, 83.
- 25 Ibid.
- 26 Ibid., 80–1.
- 27 For excerpts and commentary on Kautsky’s 1906 article, see Lars T. Lih, “The Proletariat and Its Ally: The Logic of Bolshevik Hegemony,” <https://johnriddell.wordpress.com/2017/04/26/the-proletariat-and-its-ally-the-logic-of-bolshevik-hegemony/>.
- 28 For similar statements by Trotsky, see Lih, “The Proletariat and Its Ally.”
- 29 Bukharin, “The Theory of Permanent Revolution,” originally published in *Pravda*, 28 December 1924; a translated text can be found in Frederick C. Corney, ed., *Trotsky’s Challenge: The “Literary Discussion” of 1924 and the Fight for the Bolshevik Revolution* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 514–54. I have modified this translation slightly after consulting the original text in *Pravda*.
- 30 John Riddell, ed., *To See the Dawn: Baku, 1920; First Congress of the Peoples of the East* (New York: Pathfinder, 1993), 181.
- 31 Ibid., 176 (Kun).
- 32 Ibid., 194 (Theses on the Agrarian Question).
- 33 Ibid., 182 (Kun), 190 (Skachko).
- 34 Lenin, *PSS*, 21:44.
- 35 The full text of the Basel Manifesto can be found at <https://www.workers.org/marcy/cd/sambol/bolwar/bolwar08.htm>.
- 36 Kamenev, *Mezhdu*, 660–6.
- 37 Ibid., 674.
- 38 Ibid., 665.
- 39 Day and Gaido, *Witnesses*, 61–5.
- 40 Lenin *PSS*, 41:1–104.
- 41 J.V. Stalin, “Marxism and the National Question” (1913), in *Works*, vol. 2 (Moscow: State Publishing House, 1953).

- 42 Kamenev, *Mezhdunarodnoye soveshchaniye*, 675–80.
- 43 Baku Congress Proceedings at the Marxists Internet Archive, <https://www.marxists.org/history/international/comintern/baku/cho2.htm>.
- 44 Vernon L. Lidtke, *The Alternative Culture: Socialist Labor in Imperial Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985).
- 45 Lars T. Lih, “Campaignism: An Essential Theme in the History of the Left,” *The International Newsletter of Communist Studies* 19, no. 26 (2013): 95–103; Lih, “Campaignism and the Fate of Political Freedom in Russia,” in *The Fate of the Bolshevik Revolution: Illiberal Liberation, 1917–1941* (Bloomsbury Academic, forthcoming).
- 46 As cited in Lars T. Lih, *Lenin Rediscovered* (Chicago: Haymarket Press, 2006), 59.
- 47 Lenin, *PSS*, 41:1–104.
- 48 Kevin J. Callahan, *Demonstration Culture: European Socialism and the Second International*, (Leicester: Troubadour, 2010).
- 49 Callahan, *Demonstration Culture*, 282–4.
- 50 John Riddell, ed., *Workers of the World and Oppressed Peoples, Unite! Proceedings and Documents of the Second Congress, 1920* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1991), 1:10–16, 97–140.
- 51 Riddell, *Workers of the World*, 1:14–15. For revealing photographs of this event (with my annotations), see Andre Liebich and Svetlana Yakimovich, eds., *From Communism to Anti-Communism: Photographs from the Boris Souvarine Collection at the Graduate Institute, Geneva* (Geneva: Graduate Institute Publications, 2016).
- 52 Riddell, *Workers of the World*, 1:107.
- 53 Riddell, *To See the Dawn*, 72.
- 54 Trotsky, *First Five Years of the International* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1997), 2:132–3.

The Russian Revolution, National Self-Determination, and Anti-Imperialism, 1917–1927

S. A. Smith

The Bolsheviks were never in any doubt that the October Revolution would have a global impact. For them, the First World War was proof that the capitalist system was in terminal crisis, and they believed that their seizure of power had the potential to trigger a world revolution that would end capitalist exploitation and put the working class into power on an international scale. The premise of this chapter is simple, if contentious: it is that the Bolsheviks viewed the October Revolution as a revolution against capital and for international socialism, but that with hindsight we can see that even in its first decade its larger significance lay not in its assault on capitalism or even in the considerable boost it gave to working-class militancy across Europe, but in an aspect of the revolution that the Bolsheviks perceived as secondary – namely, the encouragement the October Revolution gave to peoples in the colonial and semi-colonial world seeking national liberation from imperialism. For the Bolsheviks, class not nation was the fundamental principle on which the global order was constituted, and the prospects for socialist revolution were greatest in the heartlands of capitalism, where the working class was most developed. Yet within Soviet Russia the dramatic explosion of popular militancy that had characterized 1917 quickly ebbed, while struggles of the non-Russian peoples of the former empire intensified in the course of the civil war from 1918–1921. Beyond the Soviet state there was a surge in class-based militancy in many parts of Europe, but in the eastern parts of Europe it was overshadowed by struggles for national self-determination; and in

the colonial and semi-colonial world, mass struggles for liberation from imperialism easily matched the rise in working-class militancy in the heartlands of capitalism. It is true that even prior to the First World War, Lenin had recognized the revolutionary potential of anti-imperialist struggles to destabilize capitalism in the metropolitan centres of empire; and, more broadly, he had insisted on the right of oppressed nationalities everywhere to secede from multinational polities and form independent states.¹ But Lenin's commitment, in particular as it applied to the non-Russian peoples of the tsarist empire, was deeply contentious within the Bolshevik leadership; and partly for that reason it was easily compromised – sometimes shockingly so – in the course of the civil war.²

This chapter falls into two halves. The first half sketches in very broad terms the reasons why the twin issues of national self-determination and anti-imperialist revolution forced their way up the Bolsheviks' political agenda in the course of the civil war, as a result of having to deal with rising nationalism within the former Russian Empire, the failure of class-based social revolution in Europe, and the turmoil in the colonial and semi-colonial world that erupted after Woodrow Wilson's seeming promise of national self-determination was ignored by the peacemakers at Versailles. The second half of the chapter shifts perspective in order to look at how the idea of the October Revolution as one that promised national liberation to colonial subjects was propagated. In contrast to the main theme of this book, it looks not so much to the Comintern, important though that was, but rather to the transnational circulation of activists, texts, ideas, and imaginings via steamships, telegraph, and print. It seeks to show that, in addition to the top-down organizational and ideological efforts to promote anti-imperialism that emanated from Moscow, there were horizontal processes at work that served to disseminate political excitement about the implications of the October Revolution for the colonial world. The argument is that the superficial understanding of Marxism and the very partial information that people in the colonies had about developments in Soviet Russia allowed them to imagine October in ways that reflected their own conditions and their own longings. Much of the second half of the chapter focuses on China, which was by far the most important country on which Moscow pinned its hopes for anti-imperialist revolution in the first decade of the Russian Revolution, giving the Nationalist Party (Guomindang, or GMD) and its National Revolutionary Army, led

by Chiang Kai-shek, extensive money, weapons, military training, and political direction. The Northern Expedition, undertaken by the National Revolutionary Army from 1926 to 1928, culminated in the slaughter of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in April 1927. From Moscow's point of view it was a shattering blow to its effort to combine national and social revolution, but a "national revolution" had nevertheless taken place. Chiang Kai-shek, nemesis of the CCP, did succeed in reunifying most of China, which had fragmented into rival warlord fiefdoms, and in establishing a strong nationalist government that even declared itself "anti-imperialist."³

From the moment they seized power, the Bolsheviks were alert to the potential of national self-determination to extend the appeal of October to the non-Russian peoples of the former empire, and of anti-imperialism to extend its appeal to people in the colonial world. The "Declaration of the Rights of the Peoples of Russia," issued on 2 November 1917, abolished all restrictions on the nationalities and religions of the former tsarist empire and asserted the right of the non-Russian peoples to self-determination, including the right to secede from the Russian polity (though the latter was a commitment shared by very few in the Bolshevik leadership apart from Lenin). On 24 November 1917, the Council of People's Commissars invited the almost 20 million Muslims in the empire – who were divided between the different ethnicities of Central Asia, the Azeri Turks and mountain peoples of Transcaucasia, and the Tatars of the middle Volga, Urals, and Crimea – to order their respective national lives "freely and without hindrance."⁴ Less was said about the implications of October for the peoples of the colonial and semi-colonial world, but Trotsky's decision to expose the imperialist character of the First World War by publishing the secret treaties that the tsarist government had made with the Allies – treaties which promised *inter alia* the British and French partition of the Arab lands of the Ottoman Empire, the readjustment of British territorial control in Persia, and various territorial concessions to Italy at the expense of Austria-Hungary – was an earnest of things to come. And when peace negotiations with Germany began on 22 December 1917, the Bolsheviks demanded that colonial issues be settled in conformity with the principle of national self-determination.

Given that Lenin had insisted in his polemic with Rosa Luxemburg that oppressed nationalities had the right to establish "separate states," one might conclude that a practical solution to the "national

question” had already been worked out by the Bolsheviks prior to the First World War. This impression would be buttressed by the fact that in his seminal text of 1913, *Marxism and the National Question*, the future commissar of nationalities, Joseph Stalin, scornfully ruled out one influential alternative to the formation of territorially based nation-states, namely, the model promoted by Austro-Marxists, such as Karl Renner and Otto Bauer, which envisaged that different ethnic groups be organized into legally recognized corporations enjoying extensive cultural and administrative national rights.⁵ In reality, there was no consensus on the practical form that national autonomy that might take. The majority of Bolsheviks were hostile to any serious concessions on the “national questions,” since they saw these as bringing division into the ranks of the working class. The concrete forms of national autonomy that emerged did so pragmatically under the press of civil war. The model of a dominant ethnic group possessing its own territorial republic, which formed one element in the federal Soviet state, emerged fitfully, as we shall see. And after a federal solution was devised in 1922, various forms of national autonomy were devised for ethnic groups too small to warrant a republic of their own, even including the much despised Austro-Marxist model of non-territorial cultural autonomy, which was applied rather widely to groups such as Koreans in the Far East.⁶

From the first, the October Revolution had a strongly international character. Firstly, there were some 2 million Austro-Hungarian, German, Turkish, Bulgarian, and other prisoners of war within Russian territory.⁷ Their gradual repatriation following Russia’s withdrawal from the war would provide a conduit for revolutionary politics to pass back to their homelands. Six of the eighteen members of the Central Committee of the Hungarian Communist Party, formed at the end of November 1918, were former prisoners of war in Russia, including Béla Kun. Others who became prominent politicians in their native lands included Otto Bauer, who led a radical Social Democrat government in his native Austria until it was toppled in 1934, and Josip Broz, better known as Tito, who would lead the partisan struggle against the Nazis that would culminate in the formation of socialist Yugoslavia in 1945. Secondly, there were many Chinese and Korean workers in Russia, brought under contract by the tsarist government to carry out manual labour to support the war effort. Some 200,000 to 300,000 Chinese came to Russia during the First World War – more than the 140,000-strong Chinese Labour

Corps sent to work on the Western Front under the auspices of the French and British armies⁸ – and the end of the war left them destitute and stranded. As many as 40,000 Chinese may have chosen to join the Red Army or partisan units in Siberia and the Far East.⁹ In Khabarovsk in May 1918 the Union of Korean Socialists was formed, followed in December by the Union of Chinese Workers in Russia. The latter, which claimed to have 60,000 members – almost certainly an exaggeration – issued a manifesto that read: “Chinese workers in Russia by the will of fate find themselves in the midst of the vanguard of the workers’ world revolution. They must remember that the fate of the Chinese Revolution is closely tied to the fate of the Russian workers’ Revolution. Only in close unity with the Russian working class is the triumph of the revolution in oppressed China possible.”¹⁰

In the eight months between February and October 1917 the growth of nationalism had quickened in the Russian Empire, although it was not a primary cause of the failure of the Provisional Government. Aside from militants in Poland and Finland, who saw the February Revolution as their chance to separate irrevocably from the tsarist empire, most nationalists in the non-Russian areas – mainly intellectuals – aspired to greater autonomy within a Russian federal republic, their demands at this stage falling short of independent statehood. In the course of the civil war, however, nationalist movements stepped up their demands, with some, such as in Ukraine and the Baltic, demanding full independence. For the Bolsheviks the granting of any measure of autonomy was contentious, and many were ready to sacrifice it to the paramount goal of expanding soviet power. The bloody convulsions of civil war, combined with the contemporaneous disintegration of the Ottoman, Austro-Hungarian, and German empires, spurred the growth of national identity among non-Russian peoples. Yet by the end of the civil war nationalist movements were forced to confront their relative weakness. Key groups, while feeling no great love for the Bolsheviks, were internally divided over social issues, often at odds with an insurgent peasantry, caught between the Reds and Whites, and dependent on the protection of the major powers; reluctantly, they concluded that the Bolshevik offer of national autonomy within a soviet federation was the least bad option on offer.¹¹ The tortuous process whereby the model of an ethno-territorial republic emerged as the principal offer on the table can best be seen in relation to the Muslim peoples of the former empire.

From the 1880s, Muslim intellectuals in India, Afghanistan, Indonesia, and elsewhere had begun to link their fate to that of the Ottoman Empire. This Pan-Islamic sentiment aspired to a form of modernity that would give to a putatively culturally unified “Muslim people” a status on par with the Western powers.¹² Within the Russian Empire, Pan-Islamism took the form of reformist intellectuals (*jadids*) championing movements to reform education and disseminate modern knowledge. As a result of the utopian expectations unleashed by October, and partly as a consequence of the dispiriting experience of those Muslim groups that had allied with the Whites, Jadid intellectuals largely shifted their political orientation from liberal constitutionalism to radical anti-imperialism.¹³ Meanwhile, over the border in the Ottoman Empire, Pan-Islamic sentiment underwent a similar radicalization in response to the Bolsheviks’ publication of the Sykes-Picot Agreement (the Balfour Declaration appears to have been little noticed at this time), as well as to the general devastation caused by the First World War. This radicalization was articulated in terms of anti-colonial nationalism and hostility to the Western powers, underpinned by inchoate notions of popular sovereignty.¹⁴

In 1918 it looked as though the Bolshevik offer to the Muslim peoples might take the form of a socialist version of Pan-Islamism or Pan-Turkism. Stalin, as commissar of nationalities, looked favourably on the proposal from Tatar leaders (Tatars being the Muslim ethnicity whose national identity was most developed) for a multiethnic Muslim-Turkic polity based on a large swathe of territory in Turkestan and Bukhara. It was proffered by leaders such as Mirsaid Sultangaliev as a socialist solution to the national question, yet it also mirrored the familiar Islamic concept of *umma*, or commonwealth of believers. As early as April 1918, however, this raised objections from the Chuvash, a Christian or pagan people living in the Volga-Urals region among their far more numerous Muslim neighbours. The Commissariat of Chuvash Affairs condemned the proposal for a Tatar-Bashkir policy as one “inspired by the obsolete bourgeois chauvinistic ideas of pan-Turkism and pan-Islamism,” declaring that it represented an attempt at Muslim hegemony at the expense of the “small peoples” of the region.¹⁵ The Bashkirs initially looked favourably on the idea of a loose polity, but came to reject the Tatar dominance that it implied in the course of complicated political tergiversations provoked by the civil war. It was in relation to the Bashkirs that the Bolsheviks devised what would become the principal practical expression of national

autonomy for non-Russian peoples when in March 1919 they offered them their own autonomous soviet socialist republic within the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR).¹⁶ In August 1920, the same offer was made to the “Kyrgyz” (at that time, a term that designated the Kazakhs). The Kyrgyz soviet republic was established, with a temporary capital in Orenburg (to give it a proletarian centre) that later moved to Alma Ata.¹⁷

While increasingly conscious of the political potential of movements for national self-determination, the Bolsheviks looked throughout the civil war (and well into the 1920s) to Europe in order to extend the socialist revolution. In particular, their hopes were pinned on a workers’ revolution in Germany, where it was hoped that the developed industrial economy would help haul Soviet Russia from the morass of socio-economic backwardness. For a few years, the prospects for socialist revolution in Europe looked rather bright. The First World War had left millions dead and injured and populations devastated economically and psychologically, especially in central and Eastern Europe. Robert Gerwarth reckons that well over 4 million people died in Europe (not including Russia) as a result of armed conflict in the period between November 1918 and 1923 (excluding the victims of “Spanish influenza” and those who starved to death as a result of the continuance of the Allied blockade).¹⁸ During the spring of 1919, strikes broke out across Europe on an unprecedented scale – in Spain, Britain, the USA, France, and Italy – all demanding wage rises and shorter working hours. However, the energies that were channelled into fomenting social revolution were only one element in the political strife that convulsed Europe. Just as important were the struggles of new states to carve out territory to establish nation-states from the crumbling empires, struggles that were often violent, as in Finland, Hungary, parts of Germany, and Ireland. The punitive settlement imposed on the Central Powers by the peacemakers at Versailles stoked popular anger and paramilitary mobilization in the defeated powers, which all had territory and kin excised from their polities, egregiously so in the case of Hungary and Bulgaria.¹⁹

It was to Germany that the Bolsheviks looked with hope. The revolution of 1918–19 commenced with mutinies by sailors and soldiers; demonstrations in Bremen, Leipzig, Hamburg, and Munich; strikes; and the formation of workers’ councils. On 9 November 1918, the kaiser was forced to abdicate, and the following day Friedrich Ebert became chancellor. The army high command had cynically permitted

the Social Democrats (SPD) to take the reins of power and thus grapple with the mess of military defeat. A political revolution had occurred, although Ebert never once allowed the word “revolution” to pass his lips. Close by, the Spartacist leader Karl Liebknecht announced the German socialist republic and prepared for a Bolshevik-style insurrection. Along with Rosa Luxemburg, he was murdered in the wake of an abortive communist rising. In Bavaria, workers’ councils backed a general strike and an assault on the barracks, and a short-lived communist government was brutally crushed. The limited character of the German Revolution was revealed when an agreement was signed between the SPD government and the army, followed by one between the trade unions and the employers. This guaranteed the continuity of the bureaucracy and military hierarchy of the Wilhelmine state. In contrast to Russia, the new government, backed by the generals and a strong bourgeoisie and unthreatened by an insurgent peasantry, was able to spearhead social reform at the same time as it ruthlessly suppressed the stirrings of social revolution. The leadership demonstrated by the German Communist Party in three attempted coups – the last in 1923 – was inept, but even if a Trotsky had been in charge, it is doubtful that communists could have seized and retained power.²⁰ The same was true in Italy, although there the state was weaker than the Weimar Republic and mass peasant unrest did unfold on a massive scale. Peasants returning from the front occupied the latifundia in Lazio, and landless labourers occupied the lands of large tenant farmers in the Po Valley, bearing aloft the red flag. Small holders and day labourers organized co-operatives and unions while the landowners and industrialists financed private militias, among them the combat units formed by Benito Mussolini in March 1919.²¹ The downward spiral of the economy stimulated food riots, factory occupations, and land seizures during the *biennio rosso* (1919–20).²² Yet it was not the far left but the far right – in the shape of veterans organized as *squadristi* and backed by big industrial and agrarian capital – that emerged stronger from the revolutionary crisis.

In eastern, northeast, and southeast Europe, the collapse of empires left what Donald Bloxham has called “shatter zones” – large tracts of territory where the disappearance of frontiers created spaces without order or firm state authority.²³ Here short-lived soviet republics were established in Latvia, Estonia, and Lithuania at the end of 1918; and in Hungary in spring 1919, a communist-led government lasted for 133 days. In passing, we may note the strongly ultra-leftist

character of these attempts at revolution *à la russe*, grounded in a combination of millenarian expectation and desperation. Typical was the Estonian Workers' Commune, set up in Narva on 29 November 1918, which instituted a reign of terror, nationalized banks and companies, closed churches, and proposed turning landed estates into communes. Its relentless calls for class war and its refusal to make any concession to Estonian national identity rapidly left it bereft of support.²⁴ Similarly, the second soviet government in Ukraine (February 1919), along with the regimes in Hungary and the Baltic, were virulently hostile to national self-determination (they were influenced in this by the ideas of Rosa Luxemburg); they opposed redistribution of landlord estates to the peasantry in favour of rapid collectivization; they opposed Lenin's calls for constituent assemblies (although in Hungary there was a coalition with social democrats); and they resorted to terror with few qualms. All looked to achieve revolution not primarily by working-class self-activity, but by military assault.²⁵ These doomed revolutionary regimes were convinced that world revolution was just around the corner.

In the colonial and semi-colonial world, challenges to the Western empires had been building up since the first Russian revolution of 1905–07 (Turkey, 1908; Persia, 1905–08; Portugal, 1910; Mexico, 1910–20; China, 1911–13; Ireland, 1916). The effect of the First World War was to concentrate these nationalist insurgencies in the same temporal space, to connect what had been disparate movements into a common challenge to imperialism.²⁶ As Erez Manela has shown, the Fourteen Points of Woodrow Wilson, formulated in January 1918, reverberated across the colonial world until the outcome of the Versailles peace settlements became clear in spring 1919.²⁷ Wilson's promise of national self-determination was intended only for the Poles, Romanians, Czechs/Slovaks, and Southern Slavs, and the peacemakers at Versailles were entirely unprepared for the global resonance of their rhetoric in the Middle East and in South and East Asia. Indeed, as a consequence of the Versailles settlement, the British and French actually expanded their empires through the mandate system, taking over territories that had belonged to the Ottoman and Hohenzollern empires. The sense of betrayal in the colonial world was profound. It was this conjuncture that alerted the Bolsheviks to the "awakening of the East," which had been engendered by the Japanese victory over tsarist Russia in 1905.²⁸

Shortly after the outbreak of war, the British had declared Egypt a protectorate, and by 1919 economic desperation was fuelling massive

peasant revolt, strikes, and merchant boycotts.²⁹ The socio-economic turbulence was given a political focus when the British arrested Sa'd Zaghlul, leader of the nationalist Wafd (Delegation) party. Zaghlul had written to praise Wilson: “No people more than the Egyptian people has felt strongly the joyous emotion of the birth of a new era which, thanks to your virile action, is soon going to impose itself upon the universe.”³⁰ Yet when he led a delegation to the Paris Peace Conference he was rebuffed. The British saw in the Wafd proposal to partition large estates for the benefit of small holders and the landless unmistakable signs of a Bolshevik conspiracy (it was nothing of the sort). And on 2 July 1919 the Grand Mufti issued a fatwa: “The ‘Way’ of the Bolsheviks is one that destroys all Divine laws, especially the doctrines of Islam, because it recommends what God hath considered illegal in his Book. It legalizes bloodshed, allows trespass upon the property of others, treachery, lies, and rape, causing anarchy to spread among the people in their properties, their women, children and inheritance, until they become at last worse than beasts.”³¹ Rashid Rida, the scholar of the reformist Salafiyya movement, criticized the fatwa. He opposed Bolshevik hostility to religion, but did not rule out the spread of Bolshevism among the “people in the street and the working classes (for whom) every verse in the Koran can be interpreted in favour of Bolshevism.”³² Across the Middle East, hostility to colonial rule, combined with demands for economic and social justice, was reinforced by the Treaty of Sèvres of August 1920.

East Asia escaped the devastation that blighted the Middle East as a consequence of the First World War, but the resonance of Wilson’s words there was equally profound. In Korea on 1 March 1919, mass demonstrations broke out after moderate Christian, Ch’ondogyo, and Buddhist leaders, working closely with students in Japan, demanded independence from Japanese rule. They were inspired by Wilson’s rhetoric. By the time the Japanese crushed the movement twelve months later, approximately 2 million Koreans had taken to the streets, and around 7,000 people had been killed and 16,000 wounded. The failure of the movement to obtain any significant political concessions, let alone independence, left many disheartened with nonviolent tactics. This, combined with the vision of working people taking power in Russia, inspired radical nationalists to link the struggle for national liberation to the struggle to organize the masses. Efforts in the latter direction, however, were stymied by Japanese repression.³³ A third case, which will be discussed in more

detail below, was that of China, whose government was represented at Versailles because it had joined the Allied war effort in 1917, hoping to repatriate the privileges that had been enjoyed by Germany. On 4 May 1919 students in Beijing (soon followed by students, workers, and merchants in Shanghai) poured on to the streets when they heard that Germany's privileges had been transferred to Japan. As in Korea, this was the trigger for mass mobilization, albeit of a more uniformly radical hue. Qu Qiubai, an early member of the CCP, plunged into activism and political journalism as a result of the May Fourth Movement, recalling later (in language that he might not have used at the time): "The sharp pain of imperialist oppression reached the marrow of our bones, and it awakened us from the nightmare of impractical democratic reform."³⁴

Already during the First World War Lenin had linked national self-determination to anti-imperialism.³⁵ Now the Bolsheviks hastened to respond to the bitter disappointment in the colonial world. As early as April 1918, the Soviet government repudiated the Anglo-Russian Convention of 1907, which had divided Persia into British and Russian spheres of influence. A declaration revoked the secret treaties between Russia and the Entente that called for the partition of the country, cancelled the debt incurred by Persia with the tsarist government, surrendered tsarist concessions there, and handed over to the government in Tehran the assets of Russian-owned banks. This, however, did not prevent a secret Anglo-Persian agreement in 1919, which aspired to make Persia a British protectorate. The fury felt at the Versailles settlement encouraged the Bolsheviks to do more along these lines. In the wake of the May Fourth Movement in China, Lev Karakhan, the Armenian deputy commissar for foreign affairs, issued a manifesto in July 1919 relinquishing the extraterritorial and economic rights plus the indemnities enjoyed by the tsarist government in China (although it was not until March 1920 that news of Russia's readiness to renounce these privileges actually reached that country). Subsequently, the repudiation of Russian privileges in Persia and China was compromised by the security concerns of Soviet Russia and, in the case of China, the Soviet Union would hold on to the Chinese Eastern Railway.³⁶ Yet the symbolic importance of the Soviet government repudiating imperialist privileges in the name of the oppressed and exploited across the globe was immense. Dai Jitao, the most talented publicist in Sun Yat-sen's resuscitated Guomindang, hailed the Karakhan manifesto as "unprecedented in history and

unsurpassed in spiritual nobility” and called on “all the plundered and oppressed of this world” to unite.³⁷

It was, of course, the founding of the Comintern in March 1919 that really marked the point when the Bolsheviks put the struggle against imperialism and colonialism on to the political agenda of the twentieth century. And it did so by defining this struggle as one in which the masses would struggle for liberation from their native as well as foreign masters. The Indian communist M.N. Roy – about whom more below – told the Second Comintern Congress in 1920 that, for the Second International, “the world did not exist outside Europe.” This was not entirely correct. There had been a rising tide of humanitarian critique of colonial abuses, and the German social democrats had spoken out against German policy in South West Africa back in 1906. Moreover, in 1919, the same year the Comintern was founded, the Pan-African Congress also met, to articulate a mainly liberal or moderate socialist critique of colonial abuses and to call for home rule for African peoples. Nevertheless it was the Comintern that would be the principal vector of militant anti-imperialism across the colonial and semi-colonial world. By the end of 1921, small communist parties existed in China, Korea, the Dutch East Indies, Egypt, South Africa, Argentina, Mexico, and the Caribbean. More importantly, the institutions of the Comintern, such as the Communist University of the Toilers of the East, would serve as a training ground for many who would become leaders of national-liberation struggles in the postwar era. Those who studied at the University included Ho Chi Minh, Deng Xiaoping, Liu Shaoqi, Sen Katayama, M.N. Roy, Jomo Kenyatta, Tan Malaka (a founder of the Indonesian Communist Party), Khalid Bakdash (leader of the Syrian party), George Padmore (leading theorist of Pan-Africanism), David Siqueiros (the Mexican artist), and Magomet Mamakaev (Chechnya’s national poet).

Many of those intellectuals and workers in the colonies who were drawn to the Bolshevik vision of a mighty revolution of working people overthrowing the imperial and capitalist order had only a superficial understanding of Marxism. A rather widespread “deviation” among these early converts was one that first appeared in Soviet Russia and was castigated as “national communism.” Its principal exponent was the aforementioned Tatar Bolshevik, Sultangaliev, co-founder of a Muslim Red Army whose 50,000 members were absorbed into the Red Army in July 1918. His heresy lay in arguing that Muslim society, not yet being class-divided, occupied a position analogous to

that of the proletariat in the developed capitalist world, thus subtly eliding the concepts of an oppressed class and an oppressed nation. He addressed the Second Congress of Communist Organizations of Peoples of the East (22 November to 3 December 1919) and argued that the key to world revolution lay in the East. He called for the “creation of an eastern international class Red Army, as part of the international Red Army.” The journal of the Soviet Commissariat of Nationalities observed sourly: “The impression was created that comrades might be proposing the East was virgin land more receptive to the ideas of communism than the decadent West.”³⁸ And this was indeed a view that was quite widespread among communists in under-developed countries. In China, for example, Li Dazhao argued that Chinese society as a whole – with the exception of the warlords and their lackeys – constituted a proletarian nation that would act in partnership with the proletariat in advanced capitalist countries.³⁹ Such deviations did not last long, but they testify to the desire of radical anti-imperialists to link their struggles to those of the workers in the metropolis. No doubt many who were inspired by the Bolshevik vision were never really communists, at least in the hardline Comintern mould. As one of the most prominent Palestinian communists of the 1920s, Mahmoud Al Atrash Al Maghribi, later observed: “Arab Communists in Palestine were supporters of the national idea. It was they who pushed forward the national awakening. If they dressed themselves in communist garb it was only so that they could realise their national aims.”⁴⁰

The Bolsheviks’ strengthened commitment to anti-imperialism was demonstrated in September 1920, a few weeks after the Second Congress of the Comintern, when a congress met in Baku. The Baku Congress gathered together 1,891 delegates representing some twenty-nine ethnic groups, mainly from Turkey, Central Asia, and the Caucasus. Two-thirds of the delegates recorded their affiliation as communist, though this was an affiliation more imagined than real.⁴¹ The question of translation proved a nightmare. Speeches were interpreted into Russian, Turkish, and Farsi, and sometimes into Turkmen, Chechen, Uzbek, and Komi.⁴² While calling for “the liberation of all humanity from the yoke of capitalist and imperialist slavery,” the congress concentrated its fire on the British Empire, whose armies were in control at that point of a large swathe of southern and south-western Asia. The Bolshevik leader Grigory Zinoviev issued a demagogic call to Asian peoples to “go forward as one man in a holy war

against the British conqueror.”⁴³ However, support for anti-imperialism even at this high point was as pragmatic as it was principled.⁴⁴ Sultangaliev, Stalin’s deputy in the Commissariat of Nationalities, had by that time lost Stalin’s trust and was denied permission to attend the congress. It seems Zinoviev was fearful that his presence at the congress, where sympathy for Pan-Islam and Pan-Turkism was considerable, would weaken his attempt to get the congress to endorse the primacy of the proletarian struggle in the advanced capitalist countries. Akhmetzaki Validov, who was chair of the Bashkir revolutionary committee and a member of the Central Executive Committee of the RSFSR, was only allowed to participate from the sidelines. He later accused Zinoviev and Karl Radek of “treating the representatives of the East as though they were commissars at a peasant congress dealing with the dark masses.”⁴⁵ This was a reminder that although Bolshevik policy towards the Muslim peoples of the empire had proved accommodating up to this point, there was plenty of fuel for conflict, especially in Central Asia where traditionalist religious leaders would organize a mass guerrilla insurgency against godless communism and jadidism, which the Soviet state would take years to put down and at great cost in life.

Many of the essays in this volume rightly focus on the role of the Comintern, but in the remainder of the chapter I wish to shift focus away from Moscow and its top-down relations with the emergent national communist parties in order to explore how less visible transnational connections, operating on a horizontal rather than vertical plane, helped to bring communist movements into existence in the colonial world. In particular, these served to create a political space in which colonial subjects could imagine the significance of the October Revolution for their own struggles in ways that would prove impossible after the Comintern established tighter organizational and ideological control over national communist parties. I shall briefly discuss three issues: the transnational circulation of activists; the transnational circulation of texts and ideas; and the problems and potentialities of translating Marxist texts.

Transcontinental migration in the years up to 1914 had created global networks of trade unionists, socialists, and anarchists – networks that activists inspired by the October Revolution were quick to exploit. Steamships had made ocean crossing easier and it was still possible to evade the tightening controls at national borders. Some early communists undertook adventurous peregrinations, quite

independent of the Comintern. In 1918 at the instigation of the India Home Department, the Rowlett commission published a report on the global activism of terrorists who had been politicized by the partition of Bengal in 1905, tracing them from “mutinous ashrams in San Francisco to shadowy guesthouses in London, from seditious newspapers in Constantinople to illicit printing presses in Burma.”⁴⁶ One such was M.N. Roy, who hailed from a Bengali Brahmin family and who became involved in armed struggle against the British following the partition. In 1915 he left India to try unsuccessfully to solicit armaments from Germany, and ended up travelling through Indonesia, Japan, and China before getting to San Francisco. In July 1917, now with some knowledge of Marxism, he fled to Mexico, where in December 1919 he helped set up a communist party under Comintern auspices. Men such as Roy are perhaps best considered at this stage of their careers as cosmopolitan anti-colonials, but many would soon become committed anti-imperialist revolutionaries.⁴⁷ Another was Ho Chi Minh, son of a Confucian scholar, who would leave Vietnam for France in 1911 and take up a job as a ship’s cook, which enabled him to travel the world. It was not until 1919, however, that he showed any interest in politics, having been involved in petitioning the peacemakers at Versailles to free Vietnam from French colonial rule. In December 1920 he would become a founding member of the French Communist Party, going to Moscow in 1923 before moving to Guangzhou (Canton) in June 1924. Rather different were the peregrinations of Henk Sneevliet, son of a cigar-maker in Rotterdam, and thus a citizen of the metropolis rather than the colony. As a committed socialist and trade-unionist, he left for the Dutch East Indies in 1913, and lived there until he was expelled in 1918. In 1914 Sneevliet was a co-founder of the Indies Social Democratic Union (ISDV), and, impressed by the emergence of radical nationalism within Sarekat Islam, he oriented the ISDV towards combining labour organizing with opposition to Dutch colonial rule. On the basis of his experience in the Dutch East Indies, he was sent by the Comintern to China in 1921 where he stayed for two years, helping to forge the alliance between the CCP and the Guomindang.

Global circulation of print and the telegraph facilitated the dissemination of Marxist ideas across national boundaries, with dockers and seafarers often the smugglers of seditious texts. Since the Meiji Restoration, Japan had served as the channel through which Western thought entered China, and it was through Japanese and English that

Marxist works were translated into Chinese: of eighteen translations of works by Marx, Engels, and others published between 1919 and 1921, no fewer than thirteen were translations from Japanese, including *The Communist Manifesto* and Engels's *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*. The latter appeared in Chinese translation in the anarchist journal *Xin Shijie* (*New World*); *Das Kapital* was much less well known outside of Europe, and it was not until the 1930s that a Chinese translation appeared.⁴⁸ Only four examples of Lenin's writings and speeches were translated before May 1920, and then only in extracts.⁴⁹ There was much happenstance involved in the texts that were translated, since this largely depended on what was imported into Japan or China, what escaped seizure by the police, what happened to be to the taste of a translator or a publisher, and, perhaps too, on what greenhorn socialists *thought* were the most significant texts. Throughout Asia, for example, Lenin's works were much less well known than, say, *The ABC of Communism* by Bukharin and Preobrazhensky, which became the most popular source of knowledge about communism in practice – ironically, since it had been written to justify the extreme war communism of the Russian Civil War rather than the sober pragmatism of the New Economic Policy.

Journals published by small groups of Chinese anarchists in Tokyo and Paris served as an important conduit of Marxist ideas, since they occasionally published fragments of Marxist classics. This shaped the way that the radicals who emerged out of the May Fourth Movement came to understand Marxism.⁵⁰ When in 1920 the first communist circles began to put out newspapers for workers, their understanding of Marxism was heavily influenced by anarchist tropes. They often identified the root of exploitation, for example, as being authoritarian power (qiangquan, 强权) and human selfishness, rather than labour-based exploitation. Journals such as *Shanghai Shopclerk* and *Labor World* counterposed those who laboured to those who did not; those who were productive to those who were parasitic; those who were honest and public-spirited to those who were corrupt and selfish; those who were rich to those who were poor.⁵¹ As they crossed cultural borders and became embedded in new social and political practices, words changed their impact and meaning.⁵² In part this reflected the problem of how to translate the vocabulary of Marxist theory into Asian languages, given that it was predominantly derived from Latin and Greek. When *The Communist Manifesto* was translated into Japanese in 1904 the two translators used Samuel Moore's English

translation of 1888. To translate “capitalists” and “proletarians,” they used Chinese characters pronounced the Japanese way, which in the case of the first term literally translated to “gentleman clique,” and in the case of the second, to “the common people” – which in Japan signified those peasants, artisans, and even merchants who were beneath the level of the samurai in the social hierarchy. When Chinese leftists came to translate these Japanese texts, they used the same Chinese characters, which had slightly different meanings in Chinese, but still bore little relationship to Marxist conceptions of class. Lenin’s *State and Revolution* was not published in full in Chinese until 1929, and an English reader unaware of the original title of this seminal work might legitimately translate its Chinese title – 国家与革命 *Guojia yu geming* – as *Nation and Revolution*, something that the Russian title, *Gosudarstvo i revoliutsiya*, entirely precludes. This unintentionally opened a conceptual space for a nationalist reading of this key text, and masked the fact that in both Russian and Chinese, the terms for “state” are saturated with cultural resonances that are absent from European languages.⁵³

Despite the expansion of the telegraph system, knowledge of what was actually taking place in Soviet Russia was shaped by limited information and outright misinformation to a much greater extent than in Europe. The Chinese press, insofar it showed any interest in events in Soviet Russia, relied on foreign news agencies and was often woefully ill informed. The warlord government in Beijing put out a flood of anti-Bolshevik propaganda, but it was mainly about the terror and carnage that the Bolsheviks were supposedly carrying out in the Far East. Strict censorship in Japan meant that information from that country was much harder to get hold of than recondite Marxist texts. The most reliable source of information came from English-language periodicals and pamphlets published by the Socialist Party of America, but these were irregular and did not always toe the Bolshevik line. The absence of hard information could be, in some respects, productive, since it allowed those who were attracted by the image of the October Revolution to project their hopes and utopian visions on to a canvas that, if not exactly blank, had large unfilled areas which could be filled in with speculation and fantasy.

The national and anti-colonial revolutions were imagined not only through a cultural lens but also through the press of the particular socio-political conjuncture. In China the emperor had been overthrown and a republic established six years before 1917, yet the

republic had failed to establish viable parliamentary institutions or to stem the tide of provincialism and militarism. After the suppression of representative institutions in 1913–14, embittered students, teachers, writers, and journalists turned from politics to culture as the realm in which China's national salvation could be achieved. In 1915 Chen Duxiu, who would become the first general secretary of the CCP, founded the journal *Youth*, which lambasted Confucian culture for its subordination of the individual to state, kin, and family, and lauded Western values of science and democracy. The May Fourth Movement of 1919 reignited interest in politics and revived Sun Yat-sen's GMD. For the radical minority, whether Guomindang supporters or proto-communists, the vision of a workers' revolution in Russia led by strong political party was inspiring, and led them to think this was a model that Chinese must follow. The Leninist party, in particular, seemed to offer a practical means of overcoming political fragmentation and providing leadership to a directionless intelligentsia, loosely united by the desire to stave off national extinction. Moreover, there was a deep attraction to the idea that those at the bottom of the social heap – the toiling people, the common people – could rise up in China, as they had done in Russia, in order to save the nation. Sneevelt had been at the Second Congress of the Comintern in 1920, and knew that the Comintern now backed national instead of socialist revolution as the immediate aim of anti-imperialist struggles.⁵⁴ Despite this, when he attended the First Congress of the CCP in July 1921, he acquiesced in a resolution that proclaimed: "The revolutionary forces must together with the proletariat overthrow the political power of the capitalist class, must support the working class, with the aim of abolishing all class distinctions. We stand for the dictatorship of the proletariat until class struggle comes to an end and class distinctions are abolished."⁵⁵ The CCP proved reluctant to follow the Comintern policy and form an alliance with the GMD, since it associated Sun Yat-sen's party with opportunism, self-seeking, and factionalism. It was only under pressure from the Comintern that it joined a united front in 1923. Finally, we may note that, paradoxical though it would seem from the vantage point of socialists in Europe who harped on the backwardness of Soviet Russia, radicals in China saw the October Revolution as representing an alternative vision of modernity, a new age, one that seemed capable of realizing the values of science and democracy that had been championed by the New Culture Movement.⁵⁶

We may look back at contemporary understandings of the significance of the October Revolution and judge them to be shot through with illusion, but it was illusion that stirred up hope in the possibility of change. Once the CCP began sending activists to Soviet Russia for training, knowledge of the real situation in that country grew, and the political and organizational weight of the Comintern was quickly felt. By the mid-1920s, the CCP had abandoned the fantasy of a proletarian revolution in China – at least for the short term – and come to accept that national liberation was the order of the day. But that story lies outside the purview of this chapter.⁵⁷

None of the above should suggest that the Bolshevik version of anti-imperialist revolution acquired hegemony in the colonial and semi-colonial worlds in this period. In India opposition to British imperialism was rooted in the critique of Western civilization expounded by Mahatma Gandhi or Rabindranath Tagore, and Gandhian non-violent civil disobedience was vastly more influential in the subcontinent than communism. Moreover, although abolition of the caliphate by Kemal Ataturk in 1924 seriously weakened the appeal of Pan-Islamism, Islamic critiques of the godless Soviet regime increased in intensity in the second half of the 1920s, as policy toward Islam in the Soviet Union hardened. Even in China it was the authoritarian nationalism of Chiang Kai-shek that was dominant until the end of the Second World War. Yet after 1945 the anti-imperialism pioneered by the Bolsheviks, rooted in the struggles for justice and equality of the masses and aiming at the break-up of empires into independent nation-states, would acquire renewed influence.

As we have seen, burgeoning nationalism within the former Russian Empire combined with an explosion of anti-imperialist sentiment in the wake of the Versailles settlement to push the issues of national self-determination and anti-imperialism up the Bolshevik political agenda. This had not been fully anticipated in October 1917, when socialism in the heartlands of capitalism seemed to be on the immediate agenda. Yet, as we have seen, even after 1923 when the prospects for Bolshevik-style revolution in Europe were close to zero, the Bolsheviks clung to the view that the struggle for socialism in the metropolitan centres of empire took precedence over struggles in the colonies. Furthermore, the necessity of protecting the nascent Soviet state from hostile imperialist powers always took precedence over support for anti-imperial struggles. Despite pouring vast amounts of resources into revolutionary movements in countries such as Germany

and China, there were early instances where Soviet Russia put *realpolitik* above internationalist principle, notably in Turkey. In the civil war period the Turkish Communist Party was perhaps the liveliest in the Middle East, and although Kemal Ataturk apparently connived in the murder of fifteen prominent Turkish communists and the subsequent disbandment of the movement, this did not prevent Soviet Russia from signing a treaty of friendship with Turkey in March 1921. This provided Kemal with up to 10,000,000 gold rubles and substantial quantities of arms in return for securing a border that served to keep the British at bay.⁵⁸ This was a hard-nosed instance of political expediency trumping Communist principle. Yet despite this, Soviet Russia continued to offer many radicals in the colonial and semi-colonial world, as well some African Americans in the USA, the promise of a world purged of colonial subjugation and national and racial oppression, one founded in economic equality and social justice. In reality, the Bolshevik record in the sphere of anti-imperialism fell far short of this promise, but judged against the promise offered by Woodrow Wilson, it proved more sincere, substantial, and enduring.

NOTES

- 1 V.I. Lenin, "The Right of Nations to Self-Determination," <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1914/self-det/index.htm>.
- 2 The tension between the desire to expand the Bolshevik Revolution and to protect the nascent Soviet state from hostile powers is not dealt with in this essay. It is a theme discussed in Richard Pipes, *The Formation of the Soviet Union: Communism and Nationalism, 1917–1923* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1954) and Jeremy Smith, *The Bolsheviks and the National Question, 1917–23* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999).
- 3 S.A. Smith, *A Road is Made: Communism in Shanghai, 1920–1927* (Richmond: Curzon, 2000), 209–19.
- 4 "Ko vsem trudiashchimsia Musul'manam Rossii i Vostoka," <http://www.r-komitet.ru/vera/69.htm>.
- 5 J.V. Stalin, "Marxism and the National Question," <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1913/03.htm>.
- 6 Ivan Sablin and Alexander Kuchinsky, "Making the Korean Nation in the Russian Far East, 1863–1926," *Nationalities Papers* (2017): 798–814.

- 7 John Erickson, “Red Internationalists on the March: The Military Dimension, 1918–22,” in *Russia and the Wider World: Essays for Paul Dukes*, edited by C. Brennan and M. Frame (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), 126–52. There were some 63,000 Turkish prisoners of war in Russia and they were the first group to set up a communist organization among the prisoners of war, formed by Mustafa Subhi in June 1919. The organization rejected any alliance with bourgeois nationalists and declared that “all the existing wealth must be nationalized by the people, and thereby the poor classes of society must be liberated from bourgeois tyranny. This is the basis of socialism.” M.A. Persits, “Vostochnye internatsionalisty v Rossii i nekotorye voprosy natsional’no-osvoboditel’nogo dvizheniya (1918–iul’ 1920),” in *Komintern i Vostok: bor’ba za leninskuiu strategiui i taktiku v natsional’no-osvoboditel’nom dvizhenii* (Moscow: Nauka, 1969), 54, 71. However, the Turkish Communists were the first group of foreign communists to overcome their antipathy to working with “bourgeois” nationalists, and following the Second Congress of the Comintern in 1920, they swung behind Mustafa Kemal. See Bülent Gökyay, “The Turkish Communist Party: The Fate of the Founders,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 29, no. 2 (1993): 220–35.
- 8 Xu Guoqi, *Strangers on the Western Front: Chinese Workers in the Great War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011).
- 9 A.G. Larin, *Kitaitsy v Rossii: vchera i segodnia* (Moscow: Muravei, 2003), 80.
- 10 Liu Yong’an, *Kitaiskie dobrovol’tsy v boiakh za sovetskuu vlast’ (1918–22gg.)*, Moscow: Izd-vo vostochnoi literatury, 1961, 134. We still know little about the contribution to the formation of the Chinese Communist Party made by Chinese workers in Soviet Russia, although it is clear that they played a part in persuading Sun Yat-sen to orient his regime towards Soviet Russia.
- 11 S.A. Smith, *Russia in Revolution: An Empire in Crisis, 1890–1928* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017): 183–97.
- 12 Cemil Aydin, *The Politics of Anti-Westernism: Visions of World Order in Pan-Islamic and Pan-Asian Thought* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).
- 13 Adeeb Khalid, *The Politics of Muslim Cultural Reform: Jadidism in Central Asia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); Serge A. Zenkovsky, *Pan-Turkism and Islam in Russia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960).
- 14 Alp Yenen, “The Other Jihad: Enver Pasha, Bolsheviks, and Politics of Anticolonial Muslim Nationalism during the Baku Congress 1920,” in

The First World War and Its Aftermath: The Shaping of the Middle East, edited by T.G. Fraser (London: Gingko Library Press, 2015), 273–9. Stefan Reichmuth, however, reminds us that the new states that emerged out of the ruins of the Ottoman Empire took a variety of political forms – from socialist republics to monarchies in Syria and Iran – though all were loosely secular in orientation and committed to state-led modernization. See Reichmuth, “Der Erste Weltkrieg und die muslimischen Republiken der Nachkriegszeit,” *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 40, no. 2 (2014): 184–213.

- 15 V.G. Chebotareva, *Narkomnats RSFSR: Svet i teni natsional'noi politiki (1917–24gg.)* (Moscow: Obschestvennaia AN ros. nemtsev, 2003), 82.
- 16 Adeeb Khalid, “Nationalizing the Revolution in Central Asia: the Transformation of Jadidism, 1917–1920,” in *A State of Nations: Empire and Nation-Making in the Age of Lenin and Stalin*, edited by Ronald G. Suny and Terry Martin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 145–64; Daniel E. Schafer, “Local Politics and the Birth of the Republic of Bashkortostan, 1919–1920, in *ibid.*, 165–90.
- 17 Persits, “Vostochnye,” 82.
- 18 Robert Gerwarth, *The Vanquished: Why the First World War Failed to End, 1917–1923* (London: Penguin, 2017), 8.
- 19 Robert Gerwarth and John Horne, “Bolshevism as Fantasy: Fear of Revolution and Counter-Revolutionary Violence, 1917–1923,” in *War in Peace: Paramilitary Violence in Europe after the Great War*, edited by Gerwarth and Horne (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).
- 20 Eric D. Weitz, “German Communism,” in *The Cambridge History of Communism*, vol. 1, *World Revolution and Socialism in One Country, 1917–1941*, edited by Silvio Pons and Stephen A. Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 573–93.
- 21 Jean-François Fayet, “1919,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Communism*, edited by S.A. Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 109–24.
- 22 Roberto Bianchi prefers the term “biennio multicolore.” The food rioters in Tuscany called themselves “Bocci-Bocci,” a deformation of the words “bolshevici” and “fare cocci,” which in Tuscan dialect means to smash up. Bianchi, *Bocci-Bocci: I tumulti annonari nella Toscana del 1919* (Firenze: L. S. Olschki, 2001).
- 23 Donald Bloxham, *The Final Solution: A Genocide* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 81.
- 24 Most Estonians saw the Baltic German landowners as the class enemy and wanted radical land reform. The Commune was thus unusually well placed to exploit a combination of the social and national questions.

However, its leaders would have no truck with Estonian national identity. This may have been in part because they relied on the support of Russian-dominated soldiers and workers' soviets in Tallinn and Narva, but seems mainly to have derived from the conviction that there could be no real independence so long as imperialism survived. They thus rejected Lenin's proposal for provisional independence for the Estonian Soviet Republic. Karsten Brüggemann, "‘Foreign Rule’ during the Estonian War of Independence 1918–1920: The Bolshevik Experiment of the ‘Estonian Worker’s Commune,’" *Journal of Baltic Studies* 37, no. 2 (2006): 210–26.

- 25 James D. White, "National Communism and World Revolution: The Political Consequences of German Military Withdrawal from the Baltic Area in 1918–19," *Europe-Asia Studies* 46, no. 8 (1994): 1,352.
- 26 Geoff Eley, "Marxism and Socialist Revolution" in *The Cambridge History of Communism*, vol. 1, *World Revolution and Socialism in One Country, 1917–1941*, edited by Silvio Pons and Stephen A. Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 49–73; Fayet, "1919," 109–24.
- 27 Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anti-Colonial Nationalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).
- 28 Aydin, *Politics of Anti-Westernism*. The Arab "awakening" had begun in Egypt in the late nineteenth century and spilled over into the Arab provinces of the Ottoman Empire. In China the metaphor of "awakening" was pervasive during the May Fourth Movement, and radicals used the freedom and autonomy of the awakened self as a trope through which to think about saving the nation. See John Fitzgerald, *Awakening China: Politics, Culture and Class in the Nationalist Revolution* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996).
- 29 Ellis Goldberg, "Peasants in Revolt – Egypt 1919," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 24, no. 2 (1992): 261–80; Jacques Berque, *Egypt: Imperialism and Revolution*, translated by Jean Stewart (London: Faber, 1972).
- 30 Quoted in Manela, *Wilsonian Moment*, 71.
- 31 Tareq Y. Ismael and Rifa'at El-Sa'id, *The Communist Movement in Egypt, 1920–1988* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1990), 23. I am grateful to Hussein A.H. Omar of University College, Dublin, for providing me with the full text of this fatwa.
- 32 Rami Ginat, *A History of Egyptian Communism: Jews and their Compatriots in the Quest of Revolution* (Boulder: Lynne Reinner, 2011), 15.

- 33 Michael E. Robinson, *Cultural Nationalism in Colonial Korea, 1920–1925* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2014).
- 34 Quoted in Jonathan Spence, *The Gate of Heavenly Peace: The Chinese and Their Revolution, 1895–1980* (London: Penguin, 1982), 172.
- 35 In January 1916 Lenin wrote: “Socialists must not only demand the unconditional and immediate liberation of the colonies without compensation – and this demand in its political expression signifies nothing more nor less than the recognition of the right to self-determination – but must render determined support to the more revolutionary elements in the bourgeois-democratic movements for national liberation in these countries and assist their rebellion – and if need be, their revolutionary war – against the imperialist powers that oppress them.” V.I. Lenin, “Socialist Revolution and the Right of Nations to Self-Determination,” <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1916/jan/x01.htm>.
- 36 On September 1920 the warlord government in Beijing announced that it was severing ties with the tsarist government, but declined to recognize the Soviet government. In response, the latter declared that the Karakhan Manifesto was no longer on the table and its revised version withdrew the unilateral return of the Chinese Eastern Railway to China.
- 37 Dai Jitao, “Eguo laonong zhengfu tonggao de zhenyi” [True Meaning of the Proclamation of the Russian Labour-Peasant Government], *Xingqi pinglun* 45 (1 April 1920), 2. Cited in Wen Hsin-yeh, *Provincial Passages: Culture, Space, and the Origins of Chinese Communism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 329–30.
- 38 Persits, “Vostochnye,” 94–6.
- 39 Maurice Meisner, *Li Ta-chao and the Origins of Chinese Marxism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967), 144.
- 40 Quoted in G.G. Kosach, *Kommunisty Blizhnego Vostoka v SSSR, 1920–30-e gody* (Moscow: Ross. Gos. Gumanitarnyi Universitet, 2009), 13–14.
- 41 John Riddell, ed., *To See the Dawn: Baku, 1920 – First Congress of the Peoples of the East* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1993), 30, 242–3.
- 42 Stephen White, “Communism and the East: The Baku Congress, 1920,” *Slavic Review* 33, no. 3 (1974): 506.
- 43 Riddell, *To See the Dawn*, 231.
- 44 On the eve of the Baku Congress, Trotsky wrote to Georgy Chicherin, commissar for foreign affairs, that “a potential Soviet revolution in the East is now advantageous for us chiefly as a major item of diplomatic barter with England.” L. Trotsky, letter to Chicherin, 4 June 1920, in Jan M. Meijer, ed., *The Trotsky Papers, 1917–1922* (The Hague: Mouton, 1971), 2:209.

- 45 R.G. Landa, “Mirsaid Sultan-Galiev,” <http://historystudies.org/2012/07/landa-r-g-mirsaid-sultan-galiev/>.
- 46 J. Daniel Elam and Chris Moffat, “On the Form, Politics, and Effects of Writing Revolution,” *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 39, no. 3 (2016): 515.
- 47 Pankaj Mishra, *From the Ruins of Empire: The Revolt against the West and the Remaking of Asia* (London: Allen Lane, 2012).
- 48 Chenshan Tian, *Chinese Dialectics: From Yijing to Marxism* (Lanham: Lexington, 2005), 58.
- 49 Alexander Pantsov, *The Bolsheviks and the Chinese Revolution, 1919–1927* (Richmond: Curzon, 2000), 29.
- 50 Arif Dirlik, *Anarchism in the Chinese Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).
- 51 S.A. Smith, *Like Cattle and Horses: Nationalism and Labor in Shanghai, 1895–1927* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001).
- 52 On words that “do work in the world, whether organizing, mobilizing, inspiring, excluding, suppressing, or covering up,” see Carol Gluck, “Introduction,” in *Words in Motion: Towards a Global Lexicon*, edited by C. Gluck and A. L. Tsing (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009).
- 53 In the Chinese title, the words for both “state” and “revolution” are freighted with cultural and historical resonance. The term for revolution, 革命 *geming*, originally referred to the withdrawal of the mandate of Heaven from the emperor; the term 国家 *guojia* was a neologism, introduced at the end of the nineteenth century from Japanese to denote the modern concept of the nation-state. It linked the “kingdom” (*guo*) to the “family” (*jia*), so while it denoted a territorially bounded state belonging to the Chinese nation, it carried resonances of the polity as the direct, vertical extension of the family; of authority as hierarchically organized; and of subjects, rather than citizens, as the constituent elements of the state. In the original Russian title, the term “state” (*gosudarstvo*) carried an equally heavy though quite different freight of meaning. Originally understood as an attribute – the dignity – of the divinely appointed sovereign (*gosudar*’), it came to denote the sovereign’s personal domain. By the nineteenth century, like its English counterpart, the term had come to denote the institutions of government, yet it never entirely lost the sense that these institutions were the property of the sovereign. Marxist-Leninist concepts, in other words, however abstract they appeared, could not pass unmodified across barriers of language: their meaning was shaped by the cultural and political context in which they were implanted. Joseph Levenson, *Confucian China and Its Modern Fate* (Berkeley: University of California

Press, 1958), 105–8; M.V. Il'in, *Slova i smysly* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 1997), 192–3; Richard Pipes, *Russia under the Old Regime* (London: Weidenfeld, 1974), 78.

- 54 In July 1920, the Second Congress of the Comintern passed the Theses on the National and Colonial Questions, which outlined a perspective of a two-stage revolution for the colonial and semi-colonial countries. According to this, the first stage of the national liberation struggle would be waged by the bourgeoisie, with communist parties actively supporting it, but taking care to preserve their autonomy by organizing the working class and peasantry.
- 55 Tony Saich, *The Rise to Power of the Chinese Communist Party: Documents and Analysis* (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 1994), 16.
- 56 John M. Knight, “Our Nation’s Future? Chinese Imaginations of the Soviet Union, 1917–1956” (PhD diss., Ohio State University, 2017), 18–20.
- 57 Smith, *Like Cattle and Horses*.
- 58 Gökay, *Soviet Eastern Policy*.

3

Origins of the Anti-Imperialist United Front

The Comintern and Asia, 1919–1925

John Riddell

The revolutionary activists who founded the Comintern in 1919 had little contact with movements for national and colonial liberation outside Russia. Nonetheless, only a year later, in July 1920, the Comintern adopted a far-reaching strategy for national and social revolution in dependent countries, later termed the anti-imperialist united front. This policy was adopted much earlier than the analogous united-front approach in the industrialized capitalist powers of the West. Moreover, the quest for unity in oppressed countries of Asia and Africa was pursued with persistence, while the united front in Europe was applied by fits and starts. The anti-imperialist united front did not achieve decisive results in the 1920s, and in China, where conditions were the most favourable, it led to a severe defeat in 1927. To understand this setback, we must look at the ambiguities of the policy itself and at the contradictory relationship of national parties with the Moscow-based Comintern leadership. In subsequent decades, efforts to forge unity against imperialism scored important victories and contributed to the demise of direct colonial rule almost everywhere by the end of the century. The interaction in the early 1920s of pioneer anti-colonial activists with central leaders of the Russian Revolution reveals much regarding the dynamics of such movements throughout the century.

SOCIALISTS AND COLONIAL FREEDOM

The Comintern emerged in part as a reaction against the Socialist or Second International, which unified world socialist forces from 1889

to 1914. The Comintern's Second Congress (1920) denounced its predecessor as having "in reality recognized the existence only of people with white skin," while Indian communist M.N. Roy told the same gathering that for the pre-1914 international, "the world did not exist outside of Europe."¹

As noted in the introduction to the present collection, the Marxist tradition rested on "the *economic* logic underlying the emergence of nations" which did not entail "protest[s] against all acts of national oppression."² Capitalist expansion, while cruel in its effects, was seen to have a progressive result: the creation of the modern proletariat. Some right-wing socialists, like Hendrick Van Kol of the Netherlands, rationalized this into support for enlightened colonialism. Revolutionary Marxists succeeded in 1907 in convincing a Second International Congress to categorically condemn colonialism – but only by a narrow margin of 127 to 108.³ Even then, the international stopped short of calling for independence for the colonies.

Revolutionary uprisings in China, Turkey, and Iran (Persia) in 1908–11 convinced many socialists that liberation struggles in Asia would shake capitalist stability. Lenin heralded the new era by the audacious title he placed on an article in 1913, "Backward Europe, Advanced Asia":

Everywhere in Asia a mighty democratic movement is growing, spreading and gaining in strength. The bourgeoisie there is *as yet* siding with the people against reaction. *Hundreds* of millions of people are awakening to life, light and freedom. What delight this world movement is arousing in the hearts of all class-conscious workers, who know that the path to collectivism lies through democracy! What sympathy for young Asia imbues all honest democrats!

And 'advanced' Europe? It is plundering China and helping the foes of democracy, the foes of freedom in China!⁴

It took time for Lenin's inversion of the "advanced-backward" hierarchy to catch on; Comintern documents bristled with reference to "backward" nations.

Fernando Claudin has suggested that the Second International's revolutionary wing, which founded the Communist International, was still bound within two "Eurocentrist" preconceptions, both of which can be traced back to the foundation of Marxism: (1) liberation

of colonial and dependent countries “must be the *result* of the socialist revolution in the West”; and (2) “socialist transformation of the world meant its *Europeanization*.⁵ Both issues were addressed in the Comintern’s first two years.

When war broke out across Europe in 1914, most socialist parties rallied to support their rulers and their war effort, while a revolutionary minority remained true to the international’s previous pledge to oppose this imperialist conflict. Antiwar socialists often explained, however, that they would unconditionally support a war of the colonial slaves against their European masters; among their demands was “immediate liberation of the colonies.” Lenin called for supporting revolutionary movements for national liberation, even if they were not socialist in character. Not all of his allies in the left wing of anti-war socialists agreed; Karl Radek and Leon Trotsky then dismissed as futile the 1916 Irish uprising against British rule, for example.⁶

1917: THE IMPACT OF REVOLUTION

The peoples of Russia that shook off tsarist rule in 1917 were, in their majority, members of minority nationalities and ethnic groups. Most of tsarist territory lay in Asia, and close to 15 per cent of the population were Muslim in religion. Lenin, Karl Radek, Leon Trotsky, and other Bolsheviks joined in demanding freedom for the subject peoples, including their right to separate from Russia.

When revolutionary workers’ and peasants’ councils – soviets – took power in October 1917, measures to promote national freedom were among their first decisions. One of the Soviet government’s first actions was to proclaim the right of all the subject peoples within the boundaries of the old tsarist empire to “free self-determination up to and including the right to secede.” Finland, Estonia, and other states acted on this pledge, establishing their independence. Another early Soviet appeal pledged to Muslim workers and farmers that “henceforth your beliefs and customs, your national and cultural institutions are declared free and inviolable.” Declaring null and void all the treaties through which tsarism had lorded it over and looted the Eastern peoples, the appeal called on them to “build your national life freely and without hindrance.”⁷

Within a few months, the Soviets were attacked by the combined forces of the old ruling classes in Russia and the expeditionary armies of the imperialist powers. In some cases, as in Ukraine, both sides

in the civil war claimed to act in the name of national freedom. Some anti-Soviet forces in minority nations sought assistance from abroad. Strivings for national liberation worked themselves out in the turmoil of a vast revolutionary war sweeping over a sixth of the world's surface.

In November 1918, revolution broke out in Germany, bringing the world war to an abrupt end. Workers' councils inspired by the Russian example cropped up in Germany and some other parts of Europe. Hopes were high that the workers' upsurge in the West would bring aid to the beleaguered and besieged Soviet republic.⁸

FOUNDING CONGRESS

The Communist International was launched in March 1919 by an International Communist Conference in Moscow. The imperialist blockade of Soviet Russia limited attendance to fifty-two delegates, only a handful of whom were from abroad. Thirteen delegates came from non-European minorities in Russia, including delegates from the leagues of Korean and Chinese workers in Russia.⁹

The conference manifesto, drafted by Trotsky, strongly denounced colonial oppression. "There are open rebellions and revolutionary ferment in all the colonies," it stated, projecting that the workers' upsurge in Europe would bring colonial peoples much-needed assistance. "The liberation of the colonies is possible only together with the liberation of the working class in the imperialist centers ... Colonial slaves of Africa and Asia: the hour of proletarian dictatorship in Europe will also be the hour of your liberation."¹⁰

Comintern historian Sobhanlal Datta Gupta states that while recognizing the colonial question, these words "make it evident that at the time of the birth of the Comintern, it was considered as an appendage to the problem of proletarian revolution in the West."¹¹ This conclusion may be overdrawn; the text can be read as a simple statement of expectations at a time when, in the view of revolutionary socialists, the probable triumph within months of revolution in central and western Europe would soon demolish the colonial empires. The manifesto, translated into many languages, influenced anti-colonialism in many parts of the world. For example, Claude McKay, a pioneer black communist in the US, tells us that "this passage in the manifesto awakened interest among many groups of radical blacks, who distributed the document across the US."¹² Other resolutions of the First

Comintern Congress pledged support to colonial peoples in their struggle against imperialism and condemned the previously pro-war workers' parties for explicitly endorsing colonial rule.¹³

Datta Gupta also notes an ill-advised reference in another Congress resolution's reference to the imperialists' use, against European workers, of "brutal, barbaric colonial troops" – that is, working people conscripted in the colonies. Dutch delegate S.J. Rutgers protested against this passage, proposing instead a denunciation of the colonial powers for attacking workers in Europe "with the same ruthlessness with which they proceeded against colonial peoples." Rutgers's proposal was not incorporated. Yet even as the Congress met, African troops deployed in France's intervention against the Soviet republic were demonstrating their opposition to this war; French generals called them "uncontrollable." The error regarding "black troops" was not formally rectified until the Comintern's 1921 world Congress.¹⁴

FOR "COMBINED" GLOBAL STRUGGLE

The founding Congress's focus on revolution in Europe was soon modified. Eight months after the founding Congress Lenin proposed a framework for an integrated, global struggle against imperialism. By then, the greatest crisis of the civil war had passed, and Soviet armies, including close to 300,000 Muslim and 50,000 immigrant Chinese soldiers, were advancing into Asia. In November 1919, Lenin explained the implications of this struggle to a conference of Communist Organizations of the Peoples of the East, founded the previous year to unite pro-Soviet groups among the predominantly Muslim peoples of the old tsarist empire. Lenin said, in part: "the socialist revolution will not be solely, or chiefly, a struggle of the revolutionary proletarians in each country against their bourgeoisie – no, it will be a struggle of all the imperialist-oppressed colonies and countries, of all dependent countries, against international imperialism ... The civil war of the working people against the imperialists and exploiters in all the advanced countries is beginning to be combined with national wars against international imperialism."¹⁵

A month later, on 11 December 1919, the Comintern Executive Committee established an Eastern Department to coordinate work in this arena. An educational arm, the Communist University of the Toilers of the East, was formed on 21 April 1921, administered by the Soviet Commissariat of Nationalities.¹⁶

ALLIANCE WITH REVOLUTIONARY NATIONALISM

But how would the proposed alliance of workers' and national uprisings be effected? This strategic issue was finally addressed in the Comintern's Second Congress, held in Moscow 9 July–7 August 1920. The civil war was now won, and Soviet troops were advancing into Poland. Despite the continuing blockade, 218 delegates attended the Congress, including thirty-three representing groups in twelve countries and peoples in Asia. Although most of these groups were no more than small nuclei, Lenin, in his opening report, stressed the significance of their presence in the first truly global Congress of world socialism. The Congress, he said, was taking the first steps toward a united struggle of revolutionary proletarians with the masses of countries representing 70 per cent of the world's population, who "find it impossible to live under the conditions that 'advanced' and civilized capitalism wishes to impose on them."¹⁷

The discussion was shaped by the arrival of M.N. Roy, a thirty-three-year-old exiled revolutionary from India with a formed concept of anti-imperialist strategy that differed significantly from that of Lenin. The nub of the disagreement was Roy's skepticism, based on Indian experience, about the prospects for a viable alliance with bourgeois nationalist forces. The Bolsheviks, under tsarism, had been dismissive of the revolutionary potential of Russian capitalists, but did not extend this judgement to the entire colonial bourgeoisie, who seemingly had something to gain from national independence.

Roy and Lenin had extensive discussions, in which each modified his theses to accommodate suggestions of the other. Both sets of theses were then presented jointly to a panel of delegates ("commission"), communicated to the Congress, and overwhelmingly adopted. Lenin reported to the Congress that the commission, in response to Roy's objections, had altered its description of the proposed alliance, substituting the term "national-revolutionary" for the term "bourgeois-democratic." Lenin continued: "The significance of this change is that we, as Communists, should and will support bourgeois liberation movements in the colonies only when they are genuinely revolutionary, and when their exponents do not hinder our work of educating and organizing in a revolutionary spirit the peasantry and the masses of the exploited. If these conditions do not exist, the Communists in these countries must combat the reformist bourgeoisie."¹⁸

Lenin explained that this definition would not apply to the bourgeoisie of the oppressed country if, while supporting the national movement, it joined with the imperialist bourgeoisie against “all revolutionary movements and revolutionary classes,” as is “very often” the case.¹⁹ It has been objected that this terminological change failed to resolve a very real political dilemma. “The bourgeois liberation movement that does *not* fear the arousal of the ‘mass of the exploited’ is not to be found in the twentieth century,” writes Duncan Hallas. A genuinely revolutionary nationalist movement, adds Claudin, is as hard to find as a “white blackbird.”²⁰ In fact, Lenin, in his report, applied the term “bourgeois-democratic” very broadly to include the peasants, “who represent bourgeois-capitalist relations.”²¹ Moreover, there certainly are instances where revolutionary-nationalist movements, as Lenin defines them, have been victorious, as for example in Cuba.

Still, there is a genuine dilemma here, which becomes clear if this formula for alliance is compared with the “united front” recommended by the Comintern for imperialist countries in 1921. The latter policy proposes alliance around specific demands with all major workers’ organizations, regardless of their leadership. The decision to ally with revolutionary-nationalist forces, by contrast, was dependent on a judgement call based on their character and the political context.

The introduction to the present volume notes that offers of alliance could seem insincere since communists were “in the untenable position of simultaneously supporting bourgeois nationalists and seeking to undermine them (as would be the case in the Chinese Revolution of 1925–27).” It was the bourgeois allies – the Guomindang – who betrayed the alliance in 1925–27, but in its later Stalinist years, the Comintern was notoriously unreliable in its alliances. The period under discussion, however, is not marked by such turnabouts. When reformist leaders expressed doubts regarding the durability of alliances with the Comintern, the early international responded in the spirit of Karl Radek, one of its leaders, who stated in 1922, “That depends on you. Show that you want to fight, and then we will travel at least a part of the road with you.”²²

The Second Congress also laid to rest the second assumption identified by Claudin as “Eurocentrist,” namely that every people must experience a capitalist stage of development. “The backward countries,” explained Lenin, “aided by the proletariat of the advanced countries, can go over to the soviet system and, through certain stages

of development, to communism, without having to pass through the capitalist stage.”²³ In saying this, the introduction to the present volume maintains, “Lenin turned the existing Marxist orthodoxy on its head,” by denying the need for societies to develop through an unvarying sequence of productive modes. Nonetheless, this notion found expression in a variety of contexts. The Soviet republic strove to integrate pre-capitalist nomadic societies into a post-capitalist state. It also attempted, as Clara Zetkin explained to the Comintern’s 1922 Congress, to encourage the peasantry’s “old and deeply felt traditions of indigenous village communism,” viewing them as “beginnings of communist understanding.” At the same Congress, Tahar Boudengha, a delegate from Tunisia, pointed to patriarchal communism in North Africa, saying that “we can nonetheless develop it, reform it, and replace it by fully developed communism.” Later in the decade, José Carlos Mariátegui and other Latin American Marxists applied this concept to the analysis of Indigenous peoples in their hemisphere.²⁴

The introduction to this volume notes that “Lenin seemed relatively uninterested in the ontological and epistemological status of nations as historical phenomena, but ... highly interested in the epochal potential that liberating nations from empires might hold.” This judgement applies equally to the broader leadership of Bolshevik and world Communist movements. During the 1920s, however, the Soviet state was committed to a vast project of assisting minority nationalities in promoting their cultural identity, including through the development of national languages and alphabets, teaching and publishing in these languages, and preference in employment – all in the cause of promoting internationalism among Soviet peoples. Although not well integrated at that time into the corpus of Marxist theory, “affirmative action” for Soviet nationalities took root in the consciousness of many Comintern activists.²⁵

These steps were not taken without resistance. Indeed, Lenin’s final writings sounded the alarm against a tendency in some Russian communists to act as “a vulgar Great-Russian” bully.²⁶ In the 1930s, these gains were compromised. Soviet policy veered toward Russification, while Stalin’s murderous purges took a heavy toll among minority peoples. Nonetheless, the achievements in nationalities policy proved to be among the most resilient achievements of the Russian Revolution, and are reflected even today in structures of the Russian federal republic and the now-independent borderland states.

THE COMINTERN LOOKS EAST

Relations with pre-capitalist societies came to the fore in the Congress held two months later in Baku, Azerbaijan, rightly described by Comintern President Grigory Zinoviev as the “complement, the second half” of the Second World Congress.²⁷

Since the “first session” ended in July, events in Europe had taken a decisive turn. The Red Army offensive into Poland had been repulsed, and both sides sought peace. The seven-year cycle of war and civil war in European Russia ended. Meanwhile, Asiatic Russia and its southern borderlands were torn by upheaval and war. British armies were now in retreat from their Central Asiatic outposts, while the Red Army advanced southward and eastward. New Muslim-led Soviet republics had sprung up in the Russian borderlands. Since April, Azerbaijan had been a Soviet republic, with Baku as its capital. Across its southern border, Turkey was gripped by revolution, as a new nationalist government based in Ankara fought to win national independence. For the Comintern, as E.H. Carr has noted, the Baku Congress was to begin a process “of calling in the East to redress the balance of the West.”²⁸

Convened as a mass anti-imperialist assembly of workers and peasants from Turkey, Armenia, and Iran, the Congress registered 1891 participants, mostly from Asian Soviet republics but with delegations of more than 100 from Iran, Georgia, Armenia, and Turkey. Among them two-thirds recorded their affiliation as communist, while the balance included a diversity of radical nationalists of many persuasions.²⁹ The Congress record reflects strenuous efforts to forge a synthesis between national and socialist revolutions, revealing strains over policy in Turkey, Palestine, communist policy in the Soviet republics of Asia, and toward women.

In a speech to the Baku Congress, Narbutabekov, Congress co-chair and also chair of its caucus of non-communist delegates, sharply attacked chauvinist practices by some Soviet officials in Central Asia. A lengthy protest arguing the case against such abuses, signed by twenty-one delegates from Central Asia, the Caucasus, Iran, and India, was presented by Turar Ryskulov.³⁰ The indignant Turkestan revolutionists received a good measure of satisfaction. After the close of the Congress, twenty-seven of its delegates travelled to Moscow, met with the Communist Party Political Bureau, and

helped shape a decision, drafted by Lenin, addressing their complaints and taking corrective action. This is the only instance where a minority initiative at a Comintern gathering obtained an alteration of Soviet internal policies.³¹

ORGANIZING REVOLUTIONARY WOMEN OF THE EAST

Fifty-five women took part in the Baku Congress, and women's struggle for liberation was addressed during the proceedings on several occasions. The active role of these women challenged the outlook of many delegates whose societies still practiced, to varying degrees, the seclusion of women. A proposal to elect three women to the Presiding Committee aroused strong objections, often rooted in religious faith, among some non-communist participants. The issue was discussed by the caucus of non-communist delegates, and the ensuing debate lasted several days. On the sixth day of sessions, the chair called on the Congress to include three women: Bulach Tatu from Dagestan, Najiye Hanum from Turkey, and Khaver Shabanova-Karayeva from Azerbaijan – of whom the last two addressed the Congress.³²

The proceedings at this point read: “‘Yes, yes.’ *Applause, rising to an ovation* ... Chair: ‘Long live the emancipation of the women of the East!’ *Loud applause. Shouts of ‘Hurrah!’ All Stand. Ovation.*”³³

A report on Comintern work among women of the East was given at its Fourth Congress by Varsenika Kasperova, head of the women's division of the international's Eastern Department. Kasperova called for development of “an intelligentsia of revolutionary women” of the East and concluded that “neither the anti-imperialist united front nor the united front of women workers can be realized without drawing in the broadest masses of women.”³⁴ Kasperova, like a significant majority of prominent participants in the early Comintern who were within Joseph Stalin's reach and whose fate is known fell victim to Stalin's murderous repression in the 1930s. The tally at the Baku Congress is particularly grim: every one of its speakers from Asia fell victim to the frame-up purges.³⁵

FREEDOM FROM BRITISH DOMINATION

While calling for “the liberation of all humanity from the yoke of capitalist and imperialist slavery,” the Congress aimed its main fire against

Britain, whose colonialist armies then dominated the entire southern and southwestern tier of Asian nations. It issued a celebrated call: “Go forward as one man in a holy war against the British conqueror.”³⁶

The Baku Congress contributed to forcing British withdrawal from Central Asia during the year that followed, but the result was a consolidation of national capitalist states in Iran, Afghanistan, and Turkey, and an ebbing of revolutionary ferment in the region. The Soviet republic’s treaties with these countries in early 1921 marked advances for both the Soviet state and the cause of anti-imperialism, but also a restabilization of capitalist rule south of the Soviet borders.³⁷

The British threat had been most acute in Turkey. British and allied Greek forces faced off against the uprising led by Mustafa Kemal (later Atatürk), a national movement of the “reformist” variety identified by the Second Congress. The Congress received a statement of greetings from the Kemalist movement, to which it did not reply. Nonetheless, in another context, the Congress noted that the “broad nationalist-revolutionary movement in Turkey is directed only against foreign oppressors,” offering no solution to the suffering of the Turkish masses. It urged Turkish workers and peasants to join in “independent organizations to carry the cause of emancipation through to the end” – an accurate description of the path subsequently taken by communists in Turkey.³⁸

The Soviet government supported Kemal’s rebel government with arms and advisors and signed a treaty with it in 1921, repudiating concessions extorted in the past by the tsarist rulers. Soviet aid contributed to Turkey’s decisive victory in 1922 over the occupying powers. The 1922 Comintern Congress hailed this outcome as a gain for the Soviet republic and the first breach in the Versailles system of treaties imposed by the victorious powers after the world war.³⁹ Meanwhile, however, Kemal’s regime harshly repressed Turkey’s communists.⁴⁰

The Soviet government faced a similar choice in Iran. Britain effectively occupied Iran in 1919–20, using it as a staging area for attacks on the Soviet republic. As the Red Army pressed back, it entered an Iranian province, Gilan, where it protected a left-leaning insurgent regime. After the expulsion of British forces and the signing of a Soviet-Iranian treaty in 1921, the Soviets withdrew their army, leading to the overthrow of insurgent rule.

The introduction to the present volume suggests that – with respect to a similar treaty at the time, the Anglo-Soviet Trade Agreement of

1921 – such treaties reflected a “political-ethical dilemma,” a clash of “ideological and pragmatic interests.” Comintern leaders strongly maintained that Soviet and world-revolutionary interests were one, and that the victory for Iran and Turkey over invading powers was a gain for toilers everywhere. At the Comintern’s 1921 Third Congress, however, some delegates raised their doubts regarding Soviet state influence in the international.⁴¹ Strains of this type arise in every sphere of revolutionary work and are inherent in the very project of unifying all toilers in a common movement. Nonetheless, the Third Congress debate anticipated what was to become a decisive issue in years to come. After Lenin’s death, the Comintern’s work was increasingly disrupted by such a “clash of interests,” especially regarding shifts in Soviet diplomatic and political policy.

Meanwhile, in British India, the dominant region of South Asia, mass resistance to British rule, firmly under bourgeois leadership, diminished for a time after 1922. Communist nuclei in different parts of India were subjected to severe repression between 1921 and 1924, particularly through three well-publicized conspiracy trials, and the nascent movement was driven underground. In 1924, the Comintern gave its support to Roy’s proposal of building a People’s Party in India as a revolutionary nationalist alternative to the bourgeois-led Indian National Congress.⁴² It was not until 1925, at the close of the period under consideration here, that a conference of about 500 participants founded the Communist Party of India as a national movement.

Latin America was not much discussed in the Comintern’s first five years, and it was not embraced in habitual references to the East. True, in the Second Congress (1920), US delegate Louis Fraina declared that “all of Latin America must be regarded as a colony of the United States” and as “the colonial base of the United States.” At the Baku Congress, his compatriot John Reed made essentially the same point with reference to the Mexican revolution (1910–20), the sole analysis of this upheaval in early Comintern proceedings. Only in the late 1920s did Latin America come into the Comintern’s focus as an arena of anti-imperialist struggle.⁴³

INDONESIA: FRUITS OF THE “BLOC WITHIN”

The most advanced experience of communist alliance with national revolutionists occurred in Indonesia (Dutch East Indies) before the Baku Congress. However, it was not mentioned at the Congress, even

though one of its architects, the Dutch communist Maring (Henk Sneevliet), was present in the hall. Maring had been a leader for many years of revolutionary socialist Dutch settlers in Indonesia, who had achieved the remarkable feat of transforming their group into one predominantly Indigenous in leadership and membership.

The key to success had been a close alliance with a mass national-revolutionary organization of the type described by the Second Congress, Sarekat Islam. Their tactic, which they called a "bloc within," involved building a group of communists within the Islamic organization both by sending comrades into the movement and recruiting from its ranks. The bloc with Sarekat Islam, which started up before the Comintern was formed, had resulted in consolidation of a small but viable communist party in Indonesia.⁴⁴

Maring's silence at Baku and his evasive report to the Second Congress probably reflected uncertainty as to whether the Sarekat Islam bloc was compatible with Comintern policy, particularly since Sarekat Islam was a Pan-Islamic movement of the type sharply criticized by the Second Congress. The Baku Congress would seem to refute that position, at least in spirit. Two years later, Tan Malaka, a leader of the Comintern's Dutch East Indies party, helped convince the Fourth Congress to adopt a more flexible policy on Pan-Islamism.⁴⁵ In the late spring of 1921, the Comintern sent Maring on a mission to China. Based on his subsequent actions, he clearly thought that the Sarekat Islam experience was relevant to his assignment.

CONTINUED UPHEAVAL IN THE FAR EAST

The restabilization seen in the Middle East and Central Asia in 1921 did not extend to the Far East. A Japanese interventionist army still occupied Vladivostok and Russia's Pacific maritime provinces; counterrevolutionary armies operated in that region and in Mongolia. Through an extended campaign lasting through 1922, Soviet forces defeated the White Guard armies and forced the Japanese army to withdraw. In the process, pro-Soviet forces prevailed in Mongolia, which regained its independence as an ally of Soviet Russia.

To the south, however, China remained dismembered by rival warlord armies and the intrusion of many rival imperialist powers, including Japan. The revolution of 1911 had overthrown the emperor and established a republic, but reactionary and centrifugal forces soon gained the upper hand. Sun Yat-sen (Sun Zhongshan), a leader of the

revolution and first president of the republic, launched a political movement, the Guomindang (GMD – also known as Kuomintang or the Chinese “Nationalists”), to seek realization of the revolution’s progressive ideals. In 1921, Sun established a regional government in Guangdong, an important southern province. Meanwhile, in July 1921, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) was formed by a small group of revolutionary intellectuals. The GMD and the CCP remained the main actors in Chinese political life until the triumph of a communist-led revolution in 1949.

PROGRESS AND FRUSTRATION AT MOSCOW CONGRESSES

The CCP’s foundation coincided with the final week of the Comintern’s Third World Congress in Moscow. The international was gripped by a grave crisis arising from events in Germany, and no time was found in the three-week event for a substantive discussion of the colonial and semi-colonial countries. Three sets of theses reflecting the experience of communists in Iran, India, and China were submitted to the Congress, but they were not taken up. Efforts to draft a resolution on the East were unsuccessful. The single session dedicated to the East provoked a strong protest from M.N. Roy for its slipshod approach, while French delegate Charles-André Julien complained that “the main role has been played by cinematography.”⁴⁶

The three sets of draft theses differed in their approach, reflecting a diversity of experience in Iran, India, and China. M.N. Roy’s draft stressed the revolutionary potential of the nascent proletariat in the colonies; drafts by Sultanzade and Zhang Tailei called for a revolutionary anticolonial alliance, anticipating what became known as a revolutionary anti-imperialist united front.

There were similar frictions at the Second, Fourth, and Fifth Congresses regarding the weight accorded to discussion of the East. None of the three major expanded conferences of the Comintern in 1922 and 1923 took up the struggles of colonized peoples.⁴⁷ The tensions on this issue reflected an underlying disproportion. The victims of colonial and semi-colonial subjugation, as Lenin had pointed out, made up 70 per cent of the world’s population, but in 1921 communists from these regions made up only about 1 per cent of the international’s membership. The Comintern’s magazine *Kommunistische Internationale* devoted about 10 per cent of its

articles in the early 1920s to the “East,” a creditable achievement under the circumstances but far less than what was needed to develop policy for still poorly understood regions.

Even so, delegates from Asia could not fail to note the disrespect suggested at certain moments of the Congresses. In the Third Congress, the esteemed Bulgarian communist Vasil Kolarov announced at the start of substantive discussion of the Eastern question that speeches would be limited to five minutes and would not be translated. No similar actions were taken in any other early Comintern congress. Following the protests by Roy and Julien, Kolarov replied that the Eastern question had been adequately discussed the previous year. Delegates from the East should be satisfied, he said, with the opportunity afforded them to “make contact with the international proletariat.”⁴⁸ The following year, at the Fourth Congress, two full sessions were devoted to the Eastern question and a resolution was adopted. Even so, frustrations boiled over. Delegations from ten Asian countries joined to “protest the fact that the Presidium and the Congress ... have not devoted appropriate attention to the question of the East and the colonies.” Complaints regarding the handling of the “Eastern question” at this Congress were unique in frequency and vehemence. Responses from the Presidium were dismissive. Replying to Eastern delegates’ complaints that their work did not meet with interest, Radek stated that “interest in parties is tied to their deeds.”⁴⁹

More positively, the Fourth Congress proceedings give evidence of increasing collaboration and cross-fertilization among the delegates from colonized and racialized peoples. In fact, both the 1921 and 1922 Congresses display confident self-assertion and often effective pushback from the national delegations.⁵⁰ The preparation for the Third Congress of three resolutions on the anti-colonial struggle was surely the result of a common project. The joint protest to the Fourth Congress showed a high degree of mutual confidence. The Fourth Congress decision on Pan-Islamism resulted from protests by delegates of both Indonesia and Tunisia. Two New York-based delegates from the African Black Brotherhood to the Fourth Congress secured adoption of theses on the black question reflecting a broadly Pan-Africanist viewpoint.⁵¹

Frustrations found expression again in the Fifth Congress, when Nguyen Ai Quoc (Ho Chi Minh) famously upbraided communist parties in the metropolitan powers for doing “more or less zero” to aid the struggle for colonial freedom.⁵² Thereafter, as metropolitan parties stepped up collaboration with communists in the colonies, the results

were not necessarily all that positive. Datta Gupta tells us that the British Communist Party was chronically patronizing in its relations to the party in India, with the result that Indian communists who had lived in Britain or collaborated with the British movement had privileged status back home. Roy's independent thought led to his expulsion from the Comintern in 1929. Many communist parties in Asia were able "to carve out their own space rather autonomously in conformity with local conditions," Datta Gupta says, "but in India this did not happen." When the Comintern came to be strictly aligned with the Russian Communist Party, he adds, "for the Communist parties the losses incurred were incalculable, with the 'freedom to think differently,' as Rosa Luxemburg famously said, foreclosed permanently."⁵³

OPPORTUNITY IN CHINA

At the time of Maring's mission in 1921, China and the Soviet Republic can be said to have shared a natural affinity. Both countries had been battered by imperialist interventions, and both were struggling to unify their territories. Both had recently experienced revolutions that overthrew ancient empires. Their populations consisted mostly of unlettered peasants. They shared an immensely long Asian frontier.

The situation in China was also similar to events in Turkey: an insurgent nationalist movement was challenging the grip of imperialism and its local allies. But in contrast to the Kemalist movement, the GMD, while bourgeois in leadership, had a progressive cast; its leader Sun Yat-sen advocated a form of socialism for China. Starting in 1918, Soviet diplomats made repeated attempts to establish contact with Sun, stressing their perception of "common aims" in terms of "popular liberation" and "enduring peace." On 28 August 1921 Sun responded, writing to Soviet foreign affairs commissar Georgy Chicherin of his intense interest in Soviet activity, particularly in the education of the new generation, which he aimed to conduct "in the same way as Moscow has done."⁵⁴ Maring's discussions in 1921 with Sun Yat-sen helped set in motion Soviet aid to the GMD, which contributed significantly over the next five years to its rising power and military success.

ANTI-IMPERIALIST UNITY IN CHINA

The nascent communist movement in China faced a daunting challenge. While communism in Europe grew out of a long-established

Marxist movement, there was no Marxist tradition in China. The few dozen pioneer Chinese communists had little class struggle experience and few contacts in the working class. The country was vast, with an immense population. The communists' isolation was all the more striking compared to the Guomindang, which – although not structured as a mass party – had immense prestige flowing from its continuity with the 1911 revolution and the reputation of Sun Yat-sen.

Maring's initial observations of the communist movement, as summarized by Alexander Pantsov, were that its members must find a way to work within the GMD. In Pantsov's words, Maring believed that this would "make it easier for the CCP [Chinese Communist Party] to get in touch with the workers and soldiers of South China, where the government was in the hands of Sun Yatsen's supporters. Maring emphasized that the CCP must not 'give up its independence, on the contrary, the comrades must together decide which tactics they should follow within the GMD ... The prospects for propaganda by the small groups [of Communists], as long as they are not linked to the GMD, are dim.'"⁵⁵ Maring shared his views with leading comrades in China, who were quite resistant.

TOWARD A CONSENSUS

Independent of this discussion in China, the Comintern convened a conference in Moscow of communist and national revolutionaries from the Far East, held from 21 January–1 February 1922. Among about 140 participants from Asia, the largest delegations came from Korea, China, Japan, and Mongolia. Notably, GMD representatives took part.

The main reports reiterated the Second Congress strategy of support for national-revolutionary forces while applying it to different national contexts. Directly addressing the GMD delegates, Bolshevik leader G.I. Safarov declared: "We are supporting and will continue to support your struggle insofar as it is a matter of a nationalistic and democratic uprising for national emancipation. But at the same time we shall independently carry on our Communist work of organizing the proletarian and semi-proletarian masses of China."⁵⁶

Maring's proposal to the Chinese communists, however, went further than conditional support to the GMD; it involved joining the movement and carrying out communist work within it. Meeting resistance, Maring pressed his case, bringing into play the authority

of the Comintern Executive Committee (ECCI). In response, the party's Second Congress (15–23 July 1922) resolved:

it is imperative that the proletariat gain freedom and join the democratic revolutionary movement. There is no other way. [This] does not mean that the proletariat surrenders to the democratic elements who represent only the bourgeoisie ... Yet it is a fact that there must be a temporary alliance with the democratic elements to overthrow the exploitation by our common enemies – the feudal warlords internally and the international imperialists externally ... Under no circumstances should [the proletariat] become dependent on them or merge with them ... It must assemble in the political party of the proletariat – under the CCP's banner – and independently construct its own movement.⁵⁷

The Chinese party leadership continued to oppose aspects of the ECCI's policy toward the GMD through to the disastrous collapse of the alliance in 1927. Nonetheless, initially, this alliance appears to have aided the CCP's growth and integration into working-class struggles, increasing its membership into the tens of thousands by 1925. The party's general secretary, Chen Duxiu, commented the following year that "the victory of the United Front will of course be a victory for the bourgeoisie. But only in the United Front will the young proletariat be able to fight by actual deeds and not by the mere avowal of principles."⁵⁸

The Chinese party position was essentially reiterated in a directive sent by Comintern leader Karl Radek to Maring in August 1922. The full text, published in English in 1994, has been aptly summarized by Pantsov as stressing "absolute independence of the Communist party inside the Guomindang." The directive "pointed out that intra-party cooperation with the GMD must last only until the CCP became a mass political party in its own right as a result of the deepening of the 'gulf between the proletarian, bourgeois, and petty-bourgeois elements' in the alliance."⁵⁹

FOURTH WORLD CONGRESS: A MOMENT OF HESITATION

The report to the Comintern's Fourth Congress written in November by Chen Duxiu, by then a GMD member, essentially restates the Second

Congress and Radek positions.⁶⁰ Given this apparent consensus, it is thus puzzling that the Fourth Congress, held in Moscow from 5 November to 5 December 1922, had very little to say about China.

As stated, the anti-colonialist struggle in Asia was fully in focus at the Fourth Congress. While celebrating the expulsion of imperialist armies from Turkey and the Soviet Far East, the Congress also took note of the international's extension into Africa and of the global black liberation struggle. The concept of unity with national liberation struggles was reformulated as an “anti-imperialist united front.” A resolution on black liberation was adopted that expressed the spirit of anti-imperialist unity by recognizing its kinship with the Second Congress theses on national and colonial struggles. Tahar Boudengha, an Algerian communist, highlighted the survival of racist prejudices within some communist parties and the inadequate support for colonial freedom struggles. He received strong support from Safarov, Leon Trotsky, and the Congress resolution.⁶¹

The sole speaker on China, Liu Renjing, talked of the Guomindang only briefly and in a downbeat mode. Noting his party's decision to enter the GMD, he posed it as a form of “competition with this party” whose goal was “to split the [Guomindang] party.” In the resolution on the Eastern Question, the GMD went unmentioned except for a parenthetical criticism that some of its representatives advocated “state socialism.”⁶²

This skepticism is expressed more strongly in a text by Radek found in the Comintern archives under the heading, “Resolution of the Fourth Congress.” Radek here dismisses the GMD as a force allied with imperialism and does not propose that the CP members support it. The text was presumably a working draft; it is not mentioned in the Congress proceedings and was not published at the time. Radek's Congress speech was pessimistic regarding prospects in China, but does not take up GMD policy.⁶³ One possible reason for this shift in respecting the GMD's policy is perhaps indicated in the speech by Liu, which laid stress on the GMD's ouster from government in Guandong, a setback that was soon to be made good. On 12 January, however, the ECCI adopted a statement hailing the Guomindang as “the only serious national-revolutionary group in China” and confirming that Chinese communists should join it. The ECCI also reaffirmed that the CCP should remain an independent, centralized organization whose main task was activity in the working class to “establish a basis for a powerful mass communist party.”⁶⁴

On 26 January, Sun Yat-sen signed a basis of collaboration with the Soviet Union. Soviet aid to the GMD soon followed, and the first military advisors arrived at the GMD's Whampoa military academy. Meanwhile, CCP members played an increasingly influential role in the GMD. There was some talk of trying to merge the CCP into the large organization and win it over, but CCP and ECCI statements on China hewed closely to the basic established policy.⁶⁵

In 1925, however, Comintern policy shifted sharply toward relying on its GMD alliance. The catalyst seems to have been a discussion between ECCI official Grigory Voitinsky and Joseph Stalin in April 1925, in which Stalin reportedly expressed surprise that the CCP still existed as a separate organization. A speech by Stalin the following month sketched out a different policy, advocating a shift from united front policy to a bloc in the form of a single workers' and peasants party, "a bloc of two forces – of the Communist Party and the party of the revolutionary bourgeoisie."⁶⁶

The new policy was adopted and pushed through by the Comintern over the objections not only of Chinese communist leaders but also of Maring and, ultimately, the United Opposition within the Bolshevik party led by Trotsky, Zinoviev, and Lev Kamenev. The policy led to disaster. Sun Yat-sen had died in March 1925, and the new leadership, under Chiang Kai-shek, steered the GMD toward a more conservative course and greater distance from the CCP. The Communist Party, imprisoned by a Moscow-imposed policy, was unprepared for a hostile blow from the GMD. During the revolutionary offensive of 1927, the GMD turned against the CCP, unleashing a terror campaign in which about 20,000 communists were killed. The party's influence in the cities was broken, while the surviving communists began armed struggle against the GMD in some rural areas.⁶⁷

BALANCE SHEET OF A STRATEGY

During the Comintern era (to 1943), the anti-imperialist united front became a decisive factor only in China. Elsewhere in Asia and Africa, the pace of anti-colonial revolution was much slower than anticipated in 1920, when this policy was conceived, and communist parties were also slow to develop mass roots and broad influence. Europe, with its colonial empires still largely intact, remained the centre of world politics and the working-class movement, and thus also the focus of Comintern

attention. Nonetheless, during its first years, the Comintern gave attention to and built support in colonial and semi-colonial countries in a manner without parallel in previous socialist history or in the practice of other socialist currents at that time. The grip of Eurocentrism was weakening. However, it gave way in the Stalin era to what we may call Moscow-centrism, in which policies dictated by the Comintern to the parties in dependent countries were increasingly aligned to the needs of the ruling elite in Moscow and the state apparatus over which it presided. Major course reversals in Moscow in 1928, 1935, 1941, and 1945 disrupted communist parties in the Global South as elsewhere, placing in question these party's credentials as reliable allies of colonial liberation. On the other hand, in many colonial countries, communist movements developed strong local roots and leaderships; in China and Vietnam they were soon to win state power.

The anti-imperialist united front was a logical fit with Comintern strategy in dependent countries. It was adopted universally and without friction and pursued consistently – at least in the early years – in the colonial and semi-colonial regions. This record contrasts with that of its analog, the united front in developed capitalist countries, which the Comintern adopted later (December 1921) against much resistance, and which was then implemented in fits and starts. The anti-imperialist united front contained an inherent contradiction: its sought-for unity embraced potential bourgeois allies which, at best, could be expected to be allies only for a limited segment of the road to socialism – allies that might well break away and become enemies.

Coping with this contradiction posed no insuperable difficulties for Communists. However, like implementation of united front policy as a whole, it posed a host of questions that could not be resolved by reference to basic principles, but required instead well-honed tactical flair grounded in local experience. This capacity was particularly urgent when, as in China, the communists undertook to work within a bourgeois-led formation. The Comintern's founding documents stressed the importance of autonomy and self-reliance for national sections, but even in the early years, this was not always observed in practice.

United-front experience in Indonesia contrasts interestingly with that in China. Progress in the Dutch colony was achieved without assistance; the Chinese communists received a great deal of aid and advice from abroad. Ultimately, however, the Chinese experience

showed the limits of hands-on direction from afar. Useful at first, it soon became a handicap.

And what is the relevance of the anti-imperialist united front today? It adds, of course, to the broad corpus of experience that shapes the thinking of today's movements for social justice. However, the political and social landscape has been transformed. The great antagonists – Comintern and colonial empires – have passed away. It is hazardous to deduce “lessons” from these century-old struggles. Still, the concept of an anti-imperialist united front has been present in some of the varied mass struggles of this century, such as in Nepal, Venezuela, Bolivia, Greece, and elsewhere. The very flexibility of anti-imperialist united front policy has given it continued relevance in our time.

NOTES

- 1 John Riddell, ed., *Workers of the World and Oppressed Peoples, Unite!: Proceedings and Documents of the Second Congress, 1920* (New York: Pathfinder, 1991), 1:220; 2:694.
- 2 This and subsequent quotes from the introduction are in Oleksa Drachewych and Ian McKay, this volume.
- 3 John Riddell, *Lenin's Struggle for a Revolutionary International: Documents, 1907–1917* (New York: Pathfinder, 1984), 5–16.
- 4 Ibid., 99.
- 5 Fernando Claudin, *From Comintern to Cominform* (New York: Monthly Review, 1975), 275.
- 6 Riddell, *Lenin's Struggle*, 212, 357, 369, 372–9.
- 7 John Riddell, ed., *To See the Dawn: Baku 1920, First Congress of the Peoples of the East* (New York, Pathfinder 1993), 12–13; for the full statements, see 247–52.
- 8 See John Riddell, ed., *The German Revolution and the Debate on Soviet Power* (New York: Pathfinder, 1986).
- 9 For list of delegates, see John Riddell, ed., *Founding the Communist International: Proceedings and Documents of the First Congress* (New York: Pathfinder, 1987), 41–3.
- 10 Riddell, *Founding the Communist International*, 318.
- 11 Sobhanlal Datta Gupta, *Comintern and the Destiny of Communism in India 1919–1943* (Kolkata: Seribaan, 2011), 72.
- 12 John Riddell, ed., *Toward the United Front: Proceedings of the Fourth Congress of the Communist International* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 808–9.
- 13 Riddell, *Founding the Communist International*, 202, 248.

- 14 Ibid., 131 (Rutgers), 248 (resolution), 342–4 (background); John Riddell, ed., *To the Masses: Proceedings of the Third Congress of the Communist International, 1921* (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 946.
- 15 Riddell, *Founding the Communist International*, 261.
- 16 Datta Gupta, *Comintern and India*, 95–6.
- 17 Riddell, *Workers of the World, Unite!*, 1:38–9, 118, 123–5. Regarding the use of ironic quotation marks (on “advanced” but not on “civilized”), it should be noted that the text originated as a stenographic transcript.
- 18 Riddell, *Workers of the World, Unite!*, 1:213.
- 19 Ibid., 213.
- 20 Duncan Hallas, *The Comintern: A History of the Third International* (Chicago: Haymarket, 2011), 50; Claudio, *Comintern*, 265.
- 21 Riddell, *Workers of the World, Unite!*, 1:213.
- 22 Riddell, *Toward the United Front*, 395.
- 23 Riddell, *Workers of the World, Unite!*, 1:215. The terms “backward” and “advanced” were used in the Comintern era to designate the level of development of the forces of production in a given society.
- 24 Riddell, *Toward the United Front*, 327 (Zetkin), 705 (Boudengha); Harry E. Vanden and Marc Becker, eds., *José Carlos Mariátegui: An Anthology* (New York: Monthly Review, 2011).
- 25 The Russian term “*korenizatsiia*,” described here as “affirmative action,” is often translated as “indigenization.” See Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923–1939* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001). Ronald Grigor Suny and Terry Martin, eds., *A State of Nations: Empire and Nation-Making in the Age of Lenin and Stalin* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001). See also John Riddell, “The Russian Revolution and National Freedom,” 2008, <https://johnriddell.wordpress.com/2006/11/01/the-russian-revolution-and-national-freedom>.
- 26 V.I. Lenin, “Letter to the Congress,” in *Lenin’s Final Fight: Speeches and Writings 1922–23* (New York: Pathfinder, 1995), 196.
- 27 Riddell, *To See the Dawn*, 13.
- 28 E.H. Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution 1917–1923* (London: Pelican, 1966), 3:261.
- 29 Riddell, *To See the Dawn*, 30, 242–3. By a later count, the total was 2,050.
- 30 Narbutabekov was a left-wing nationalist reformer in Turkestan who rallied to support Soviet power. Ryskulov took part in the Kazakh uprising against tsarist power in 1916. In 1917 he joined the Bolsheviks, where he pressed for more autonomy for Soviet Asian peoples. He was the head of Turkestan government from 1923–25. Both leaders were executed by Stalin in 1938.

- 31 For the delegates' protest statement, the Political Bureau resolution and one of the statements implementing its decision, see Riddell, *To See the Dawn*, 292–309.
- 32 No biographical information is available on Bulach Tatı or Najiye Hanum. Khaver Shabanova-Karayeva, nineteen years old when the Congress met, had graduated from medical school and served during the civil war in the Red Army. She was active in organizing Azerbaijani women and served in the Council for Propaganda and Action set up by the Baku Congress. Jailed during frame-up purges in 1937, she was later freed and readmitted to the CP. She died in 1958.
- 33 Riddell, *To See the Dawn*, 25, 158, 204–7.
- 34 Riddell, *Toward the United Front*, 870. Of Tatar origin, Kasparova was born in 1888, worked as a teacher, served in the Red Army, was a member of the Comintern International Women's Secretariat, later supported the Left Opposition against Stalinism, was jailed during Stalin frame-up purges, and was murdered in jail.
- 35 Riddell, *To See the Dawn*, 52. In the Fourth Congress, by comparison, Stalin's victims included 72 per cent of communists mentioned in the proceedings and within his reach. See Riddell, *Toward the United Front*, 54.
- 36 Riddell, *Toward the United Front*, 231.
- 37 The Soviet treaties were signed as follows: Iran, 26 February; Afghanistan, 28 February; Turkey, 16 March; Britain, 16 March. In addition, the Soviet republics of Armenia and Georgia were established on 2 December 1920 and 25 February 1921, respectively.
- 38 Riddell, *To See the Dawn*, 129–30. The Congress resolution on Turkey did not refer directly to the Kemalist current. It was framed as a reply to another Turkish bourgeois nationalist current led by Enver Pasha, which had also addressed the Congress.
- 39 Riddell, *Toward the United Front*, 28.
- 40 See the strong indictment of the Kemalist movement by Turkish delegate Sadrettin Celal Antel in *ibid.*, 616–19.
- 41 See especially the speech by Hempel (Jan Appel) in Riddell, *To the Masses*, 691–5. Speeches by Bergmann (Fritz Meyer), Alexandra Kollontai, and Henrietta Roland Holst expressed similar misgivings from different angles. The main reply was given by Leon Trotsky (683–8). Some years later, Trotsky was to pinpoint as a central factor in the Comintern's degeneration the divergence between the interests of the ruling Soviet elite and world revolution.
- 42 Datta Gupta, *Comintern and India*, 131–4.
- 43 Riddell, *Workers of the World, Unite!*, 1:229; Riddell, *To See the Dawn*, 133.

- 44 See Ruth McVey, *The Rise of Indonesian Communism* (Ithaca: Cornell, 1965).
- 45 For Maring's report from Baku, see *De Tribune*, 3 November 1920. For his report to the Second Congress, see Riddell, *Workers of the World, Unite!*, 1:30–1, 254–60. For the new position on pan-Islamism see Riddell, *Toward the United Front*, 1182.
- 46 See Riddell, *To the Masses*, 44 (assessment), 1,181–93 (draft theses), 855–6 (Roy), 865 (Julien).
- 47 The record of the Executive Committee conferences appears in Mike Taber, ed., *The Communist Movement at a Crossroads* (Leiden: Brill, 2018).
- 48 Riddell, *To the Masses*, 854, 870.
- 49 Riddell, *Toward the United Front*, 707.
- 50 John Riddell, "The Comintern in 1922: The Periphery Pushes Back," in *Historical Materialism*, 22:3–4 (2015), 52–103.
- 51 Riddell, *Toward the United Front*, 28–33.
- 52 Datta Gupta, *Comintern and India*, 134–7. Ho Chi Minh's speech is available online at <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/ho-chi-minh/works/1924/07/o8.htm>.
- 53 Datta Gupta, *Comintern and India*, 355, 364–5, 368.
- 54 Alexander Pantsov, *The Bolsheviks and the Chinese Revolution 1919–1927* (Richmond: Curzon Press, 2000), 46; Xenia Eudin and Robert North, *Soviet Russia and the East 1920–27* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1957), 217–21.
- 55 Pantsov, *Chinese Revolution*, 46–7.
- 56 Comintern, *The First Congress of the Toilers of the Far East* (London: Hammersmith, 1970), 193–4.
- 57 Tony Saich, ed., *The Rise to Power of the Chinese Communist Party: Documents and Analysis*, (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 1996), 39. For Maring's account of his role, see Harold Isaacs, *The Tragedy of the Chinese Revolution* (New York: Atheneum, 1966), 109. Aspects of Maring's account have been questioned: see Dov Bing, "Sneevliet [Maring] and the Early Years of the CCP," in *The China Quarterly* 48 (1971): 677–97, and subsequent discussion in *The China Quarterly*, issues 54 and 56.
- 58 See Gregor Benton, *China's Urban Revolutionaries: Explorations in the History of Chinese Trotskyism, 1921–1952* (Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press, 1996) (CCP opposition); Michael Weiner, "Comintern in East Asia 1919–1939," in *The Comintern: A History of Communism from Lenin to Stalin*, edited by Kevin McDermott and Jeremy Agnew (Basingstoke: MacMillan, 1996), 170–1 (CCP growth); Tony Saich, *The Origins of the First United Front in China: The Role of Sneevliet (Alias Maring)* (Leiden: Brill, 1991), 362 (Chen Duxiu report).

59 Alexander Pantsov and Gregor Benton, "Did Trotsky Oppose Entering the Guomindang 'From the First?'" in *Republican China*, 19:2 (1994), 52–66 (Radek text); Pantsov, *Chinese Revolution*, 42 (summary). The relevant text of Radek's memorandum is as follows:

2. The ECCI regards the Guomindang as a revolutionary party that preserves the testaments of the Revolution of 1912 and seeks to build an independent Chinese Republic. In the light of this, the tasks of Communists in China must be as follows;

(a) The education of ideologically independent elements which must in future form the embryo of the Communist Party; this party will grow in proportion to the growing gulf between proletarian, bourgeois, and petty-bourgeois elements. Up to that time, Communists are obligated to support the Guomindang and that wing of it that is based on the workers and artisans.

3. In pursuit of the implementation of these tasks, Communists must set up groups of supporters inside the Guomindang itself and in trade unions.

From these groups must be set up the whole army of propagandists who will propagandize the ideas of the struggle against foreign and Chinese exploiters.

Pantsov and Benton explain that all but the first sentence of this passage is missing from the version published in the Soviet Union in 1969 and translated in Saich, *Origins of United Front*.

60 Saich, *Origins of United Front*, 361–7.

61 For a guide to Fourth Congress debates on the colonial and semi-colonial countries, see Riddell, *Toward the United Front*, 28–33.

62 Riddell, *Toward the United Front*, 711–14 (Liu), 1184 (resolution).

63 Ibid., 32 (summary), 731–3 (Radek speech). For Radek text, see M.L. Titarenko, *VKP(b), Komintern i natsional'no-revoliutsionnoe dvizhenie v Kitae: dokumenty*, (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 1994), 1:119–21; Saich, *Rise to Power*, 1, 377–8. For a different interpretation of Radek's role at the Congress, see Pantsov 2000, 51–2.

64 Riddell, *Toward the United Front*, 32; Pantsov, *Chinese Revolution*, 59. For ECCI resolution, see Titarenko, *Komintern*, 1:37–8.

65 Saich, *Rise to Power*, 60–86.

66 Pantsov, *United Front*, 84–91.

67 For the opposition's case against Stalin's policy, see Leon Trotsky, *The Third International after Lenin* (New York: Pioneer Publishers, 1957); Trotsky, *Leon Trotsky on China: Introduction by Peng Shu-Tse* (New York: Monad Press, 1976); Harold Isaacs, *Chinese Revolution*.

Transnationality in the Soviet Challenge to British India, 1917–1923

Alastair Kocho-Williams

The Soviet challenge to British India was inherently transnational. As the Soviets reignedite the “Great Game” at the end of the First World War, using India as a point of leverage in their relationship with Great Britain, they harkened back to the Russian Empire’s threats to the British Empire and British interests. From a British perspective regarding Central Asia, Bolshevism was tsarism reincarnated, albeit with a new and more terrifying class-based and anti-imperial rhetoric that posed a “menace to the British Empire.”¹ For the Soviets, the challenge to India had two main functions. On the one hand, it answered to an ideological anti-imperialist and anti-colonial imperative. On the other hand, posing a threat to British India was a means of making the British engage with the Soviets in diplomatic relations and trade. Both the Soviets and the British approached the challenge to British India in a transnational context. The Soviets could only direct their efforts at India transnationally, and saw the colonial world as a point of leverage to further the prospect of revolution in Europe. For the British, the development of communism in India with the involvement of a foreign power provided a framework to address the communist movement in the context of Soviet designs on India, and showed an overt understanding of the transnational nature of the attempt to interfere in the “jewel in the crown” of the British Empire as the first ripples of decolonization appeared in the aftermath of the First World War.

The challenge to India posed by the Soviets ranged “across continents,” drawing together activity and agents from Russia, Western Europe, India, and the United States of America.² As a part of Bolshevik

anti-imperialism, and more keenly the keystone of an anti-British policy line, it was necessarily transnational in both aim and approach. Empire, and colonial space, was forged on the basis of control of space and what some have argued is an enforced and curated intimacy.³ M.N. Roy, the Comintern's key figure on India in the early 1920s, argued that the ability to disrupt this intimacy was pivotal to the concept of anti-imperial revolution.⁴ In this light, both the approach to India and anti-imperialism demanded transnationality. So it was that while Moscow was a focus for communist activity in the early 1920s, it was Berlin that became the chief centre of the direction of it, not just with regard to India but as a centre for more widespread anti-colonial activity.⁵ The British government in India noted the importance of Berlin "as a centre of Indian intrigue," and that there was frequent movement of agents between Berlin and Moscow early in the decade.⁶ This draws us to re-examine certain aspects of the way in which the historiography of Soviet foreign policy, and significantly that of the Comintern, has been framed. There has been a tendency to see Soviet actions and institutions, and more acutely the organizations and actions of the Comintern, within a set of distinct national contexts that were drawn together into an international organization.⁷ What is now apparent is that the "international" was a way of framing an ideological endpoint – the immediate reality was of a transnational approach in the aftermath of the Russian Revolution and this was clearly embodied in Soviet efforts to challenge British rule in the subcontinent.

It is also clear that Soviet anti-imperialism played a significant role in shaping the conduct of Soviet diplomacy, particularly with regard to the Soviet relationship with the British, presenting itself as both a constraint and an opportunity for the development of normalized Soviet relations with Great Britain. There was a need for the Soviets to balance two aims carefully, as on the one hand they desired trade with Britain and a normalization of diplomatic relations, while on the other they needed to maintain a threat against British India in order to fulfil ideological desires and to maintain sufficient pressure to keep the British engaged with them. That this was the case, and that there was an intrinsic link between Soviet activity directed at India and the way in which it tempered the Anglo-Soviet relationship in the period from 1917–1923, allows for a shift in our understanding of early Soviet foreign policy and the responses to it. Soviet foreign policy towards India was both conducted and understood in a

transnational context in the pursuit of the Soviets' goals. As such, Soviet pressure on India formed part of a triangulated approach that shaped the Anglo-Soviet relationship. So too, the British understood and responded to the Soviet challenge to India as being transnational in nature, addressing it in the national context in India while treating it as the product of an external power, and addressing it both in India and via their relationship with the Soviets. Recognizing that the Soviet challenge to India was transnational in nature leads to a reappraisal of the significance and intent of the Curzon Ultimatum in 1923 – namely, that it was intended to prove the link between Soviet foreign policy and the rise of communism in India, thus curtailing this development in India and exerting control over Soviet activity.

The Bolshevik desire to challenge the British Empire in India was not born with the Comintern, and can be traced back to the period before the Russian Revolution. Marx and Lenin had both written theoretical works on empire and imperialism, and the First World War had been cast in the mould of an imperialist war, which had in part been concerned with a struggle over colonial empire. Following the October Revolution, this ideology had not faded, and the Bolsheviks promised the liberation of the colonial world.⁸ While this partly arose as a sincerely held hope to emancipate the colonized, it also stemmed from the notion that wresting the colonies from the imperial powers was a significant means of weakening the great powers and achieving revolution in the West. As Lenin and Trotsky put it, the shortest route to London was via India.⁹

It is in this context that the Bolsheviks first launched a challenge to the British Empire in India. Following the October Revolution, on 20 November 1917 they issued an appeal to Muslims in Russia and the East to support Bolshevism, and thus began to make contact with groups and individuals who desired an India free from the British Empire. They also annulled secret treaties, and made use of their fledgling diplomatic service as a means of directing revolutionary activity towards India via Afghanistan, Persia, and Turkey, with the Council of People's Commissars (Sovnarkom) allocating 2 million gold rubles to assist revolutionary movements with funds managed by the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs (Narkomindel). Among the groups with which they became involved was the so-called Provisional Government of India, formed in Afghanistan in 1915 with Mahendra Pratap as president; the Jengelis in Persia; Enver Pasha in Turkestan; and Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk) in Turkey.

The Narkomindel was instrumental in the beginnings of the Soviet challenge to British India, a role that was never completely relinquished despite Soviet claims to the contrary. The Narkomindel published a *Blue Book* on India in 1918, which contained imperial Russian diplomatic documents, with the intent of displaying the secret dealings of the Russian Empire with foreign powers and inciting resentment in India against the British Empire.¹⁰ More important, however, was the use of the Soviet Embassy in Kabul as a base for the production and dissemination of propaganda, and for the traffic of revolutionaries, money, and arms into India via the “Afghan Corridor,” although the abuse of diplomatic privileges by the Soviets in this manner was not peculiar to this region. It is telling, however, that despite his claims to the British government, even Soviet Foreign Commissar Georgy Chicherin was keen that Bolshevik propaganda be spread in India such that a Soviet threat be maintained against the British.¹¹

With the founding of the Comintern in 1919, little changed from the earlier situation, although the Manifesto of the First Congress of the Comintern did make it clear that the colonial question was a concern. Telling, though, in the Comintern and Soviet perception of world revolution at the time, and how it might be achieved, is the link that can be seen between the Narkomindel and the Comintern personnel in departments concerned with both Europe and the East.¹² The Bolsheviks were still focused on revolution in Europe, and there were no representatives of the East present at the founding Congress. This did not mean that there was no Bolshevik conception of the pursuit of revolution in the East, but does suggest that at this stage it was not a priority. It was conceived as either being dependent on revolution in Europe or, conversely, being a means to bring that revolution about; there was no strategy at this point for revolution in the East.¹³

The change for the Comintern came in 1920 with the Second Congress, where the 21 Conditions were adopted, which included demands that every party support colonial liberation movements.¹⁴ Here, the Comintern stepped into the space created by the collapse of what Erez Manela termed the “Wilsonian Moment,” as the hopes for self-determination within the colonial world died.¹⁵ The Congress was attended, *inter alia*, by Indian revolutionaries including Manabendra Nath Roy, Abani Mukherji, Mandayam Parthasarathi Tirumal Achariya, and Mohammed Shafiq (as an observer), although Roy was present as a representative of the Mexican Communist Party (PCM), of which he had been general secretary.¹⁶ Despite Roy’s

representation of the PCM, which gave him a deciding vote at the Congress while the others only had consultative votes, he came to Moscow as a champion of India after having met with Indian communists and communist sympathizers in Europe, and publishing a “Manifesto of the Indian Communist Party: A Call to the British Proletariat” with Mukherji and Shanti Devi in the *Glasgow Socialist* and elsewhere.¹⁷

Here then, was the starting point for the Comintern’s attempt to orchestrate socialist revolution in India, even if at this stage more was done to highlight the complexity and enormity of the task than to actually formulate a plan to pursue it. At the Second Congress, the Indian Communist Group, as they termed themselves, participated in the discussions. The most significant aspect of this was Roy’s participation in the formulation and discussion of the Theses on the National and Colonial Question. While Roy’s Supplementary Theses were adopted, along with Lenin’s Draft Theses, there was significant discussion and disagreement between the two. On the one hand there was the question of India’s readiness for revolution. Lenin urged restraint, arguing that because India was not a developed state with a nascent communist movement that already existed, and because there was no Indian communist party, it would be dangerous to force a revolution which would result in the creation of a sham socialist state and bourgeois counter-revolution. For his part, Roy argued to the Comintern that India was ready to let loose the tide of revolution that had been building since before the First World War, and that this could be harnessed by the communists. On the other hand, there was the issue of revolutionary centralism, with Lenin taking the line that the Comintern should work with all Indian revolutionaries, including bourgeois nationalists, who had the common aim of freeing India from British rule, and Roy advocating a strong line of communist purity. The result was that the Congress agreed on a line somewhere between the two viewpoints, and began to take steps towards fomenting revolution in India. Crucially, though, at this point the development of the approach to Indian revolution could only be directed from the outside as the Soviets and the Comintern had yet to penetrate India.¹⁸

The Second Congress also showed the inherent transnationalism of the Comintern’s approach with a call for the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) to play a role in the anti-colonial struggle in India. While the Comintern made the point that a failure for a home nation’s communist party to support revolution was bourgeois and

anti-international – with Karl Radek of the Executive Committee of the Communist International (ECCI) specifically attacking the CPGB for passivity – the Indian Communist Group asked for practical assistance and “a concrete program for cooperation and mutual help,” with a plan of action mapped out. The driving force here was the Indian communists, particularly Roy, rather than the Comintern leadership, which was not entirely welcomed by the CPGB. Roy tried to impress upon the CPGB that unless there was revolution in the colonies, the prospects for revolution in Britain looked bleak, if not impossible.¹⁹ Roy also laid out what he wanted the CPGB to do with respect to India, having discussed the matter with British delegate William McLaine. In particular, he wanted the CPGB to support the communist movement in the colonies; to conduct propaganda in Britain and within the British armed forces stationed in India; to take measures to prevent British soldiers from repressing a revolutionary movement; to send able workers and agitators to India to help organize the proletariat; and to send propaganda material regularly to the Indian communist party that he would establish.²⁰

It was decided, however, that an Indian Section of the CPGB should be formed by Indian communists in Great Britain in order to work on colonial matters, with an Indian Bureau established to conduct the work. A CPGB Colonial Committee was also to be formed with Sylvia Pankhurst, Beach, and an additional Indian member to arrange for “practical and immediate revolutionary work in India.” In reality, Roy mobilized the leading Indian members of the British Independent Labour Party (ILP) to spearhead the CPGB’s Indian efforts after the Congress: Rajani and Clemens Palme Dutt, along with Shapurji Saklatvala (all three of whom joined the fledgling CPGB after the Congress, with Saklatvala becoming MP for Battersea in 1924). At this stage, despite the CPGB making some outward movements, the link between the British party and the push for Indian revolution was tenuous.²¹

What was clear, following the Second Congress, was that the Comintern had taken up the cause of revolution in the colonies. A Commission on the National and Colonial Question was established in order to conduct preliminary discussion on these issues.²² The next step was the organization of the First Congress of the Peoples of the East in Baku a month after the Second Congress. Neither Lenin nor Roy was present, but of the 1,891 delegates, which included 1,273 communists, there were fourteen Indians. This Congress showed

the influence of the resolutions of the Second Comintern Congress on the colonial question and endorsed them. Although British intelligence dismissed the Congress of the Peoples of the East as “an utter farce,” it was an important aspect of the transnational approach to challenging the British Empire, and, significantly, it coincided with the Indian National Congress’s agreement to adopt Gandhi’s programme of non-cooperation with the Indian government.²³ Following the Congress, the Council of Propaganda and Activities of the Peoples of the East was formed, with India represented by Achariya and Nazir Sidiq (from the communist and non-party factions respectively). The aims of the council were the publication of propaganda and the establishment of a training academy for propagandists in the East.²⁴

Despite such beginnings, the Comintern needed to start from a difficult position with respect to India. No real anti-colonial work had begun in Britain, there was no network of agents in India, and those tasked with the organization of the Comintern’s efforts regarding India were émigrés. The Indian communist movement at this stage existed only outside of India, and so the immediate priority was to conduct a campaign of propaganda within India and to train émigrés who could return to India as agents of the world revolution. Here, we see the inherent transnationalism of the Comintern challenge to India, in that it could only, at least at this stage, be directed across borders. Accordingly, Roy became the central Comintern figure in relation to India. He was appointed by the ECCI to the newly created Turkestan Buro (Turkburo) at Tashkent, which was charged with directing activity in Central Asia and which functioned under the direction of the Maloe Buro, which directed Central Asian affairs. For much of the 1920s it was Roy’s voice on India to which the Comintern paid the greatest attention, despite the fact that he functioned entirely as an émigré organizer of the Indian communist movement, directing it from outside of India.

In connection with his Turkburo duties, Roy transferred his base of operations with instructions to found an Indian communist party, establish a training school for revolutionaries, and begin propaganda operations.²⁵ Taking with him other Indian revolutionaries from Moscow, he set to work in Tashkent among the Indian émigré community there. A military-propaganda school was established, which began to train revolutionaries. Initially founding the All-India Central Revolutionary Committee, the group formed the first Communist Party of India (CPI) on 17 October 1920. The Comintern’s principles

were adopted. It was agreed that the CPI would work under its programme for India, although it would adopt its own programme “suited to the conditions of India.” The idea was put forward of forming an Indian section of the Comintern, although at this point the Comintern had not been informed of the CPI’s formation.²⁶

Undoubtedly, the formation of the CPI was big step for the Comintern, but Roy’s organization was not particularly productive. The CPI essentially remained an émigré communist party. While this was born to some degree out of necessity, owing to the problems involved in conducting communist activity in India, it also originated in Roy’s desire to be the leader of the Indian communist movement. That the Comintern supported him did not sit well with some of the other Indians; nor did his fierce adherence to the line that the CPI was the only organization that could lead India to revolution. This position echoed what he had pushed for in the original version of his Supplementary Theses on the National and Colonial Question, but it was at loggerheads with what had been agreed at the Second Congress. These factors brought Roy and the CPI into conflict with other émigré groups working towards revolution in India, even prompting an investigation of Roy by the Comintern and the Cheka.²⁷

Despite the Comintern’s formulation of a programme and the formation of an émigré CPI in 1920, the communist challenge to British India remained embryonic up to the Third Congress in the middle of 1921. The British had found no Bolshevik agents by this point; they were not convinced of the fact that so-called “Bolshevik manifestations” were actually the direct results of Bolshevik incitement; and they had no provable links between Bolshevism in India and the outside world.²⁸ Even so, in 1921 the British leveraged their concerns in their relationship with the Soviet government, using diplomacy with the Soviets as a means of attempting to check the spread of Bolshevism to India. The significance of transnational revolutionary activity directed against the British Empire in Anglo-Soviet relations was made clear at the outset of their formal dealings with one another. As negotiations leading toward the Anglo-Soviet Trade Agreement began in the late 1920s, a key aspect of British thinking was that the offer of trade could provide a significant element of control over Soviet behaviour. That the issue of India repeatedly came up in British government discussions about trade with the Soviets, and was an almost constant refrain during the negotiations with Chicherin, showed the importance and currency of India in the relationship

between the early Soviet state and Great Britain. When it came to the treaty itself, the position of India was clear: the preamble to the Anglo-Soviet Trade Agreement of 1921 made specific mention of the maintenance of the agreement resting on an absence of Soviet revolutionary activity directed against Britain and her empire, and named India and Afghanistan specifically.²⁹ Indeed, that the trade agreement was partly about constraining Soviet activity directed against India was something for which the British were criticized in *The Times* upon its conclusion.³⁰ From the Soviet point of view, though, the maintenance of that threat was crucial to keeping the British engaged with them in the early 1920s.

While *The Times* criticized the British government for making concessions to the Soviet government, the trade agreement instigated a sea change in Soviet activity directed against India. The British saw the prohibition on revolutionary activity in the agreement's preamble as having had some effect, albeit limited. For the Soviets the agreement promised them the development of diplomatic relations through the establishment of a dialogue with Britain based around trade.³¹ The British, clearly, were hoping that the Soviets could be persuaded that trade was more valuable than the pursuit of revolution outside of Russia, but they were also focused on dealing with a threat they saw in British India. To some extent, the trade agreement had the desired effect – the British noted a drop-off in propaganda in its immediate wake – but it did not cause an end to anti-British activity directed against India, nor an end to the participation of Soviet diplomats in that activity.³² Indeed, Chicherin instructed the Soviet diplomatic corps not to stop their efforts against the British in the East, but instead to intensify their work.³³ Far from dividing two spheres of Soviet foreign policy activity, the Anglo-Soviet Trade Agreement pushed them closer together in Central Asia, and the role of the Narkomindel and Soviet diplomats in coordinating the display of revolutionary activity directed against the British in India became more developed. The Soviets were prepared to make an apparent concession, and accept that they were constrained by the conditions of the trade agreement, but they were also keenly aware that they needed to maintain some pressure on the British in order to keep the British invested in sustaining their relationship.

Due to the maintenance of a revolutionary threat, the British remained focused on constraining Soviet activity. While the Narkomindel, and its diplomats, were at pains to keep their

involvement in revolutionary activities somewhat hidden and to avoid implicating the Soviet government in them, the problem became that the Soviets were not particularly circumspect in their work (by design). The British remained convinced that the Narkomindel was involved in controlling activity against the British in Central Asia, not least because the Afghan-Soviet Treaty of Friendship in February 1921 was viewed as a challenge to British interests. In September 1921 Lord Curzon, the British Foreign Secretary and former Viceroy to India, sent a note to the Soviets accusing them of “systematically violating” the terms of the Anglo-Soviet Trade Agreement. He cited a range of evidence, which Soviet Deputy Foreign Commissar Maxim Litvinov was able to refute on the grounds that the detail was inaccurate. Litvinov was correct in the details of his refutation, although the British fairly accurately summarized the broad scope of Soviet-linked activity. Litvinov, in turn, criticized the British for their constant suspicion of Soviet activity, and argued that the Comintern was not connected to the Soviet government, that the mere existence of Bolshevik propaganda in India did not indicate that the Soviets were responsible for it, and that while the Soviets might be sympathetic to revolution they were not attempting to incite it.³⁴

The origins of the note, stemming from moves made earlier in the year, made plain British suspicions regarding the Soviets’ supposed restraint, and their belief that the Soviets would not hold to conditions of the Anglo-Soviet Trade Agreement. Almost as soon as the ink was dry on the agreement, the British displayed their concerns about the Bolshevik threat to the British Empire with the establishment in 1921 of the Interdepartmental Committee on Bolshevism as a Menace to the British Empire. From reports based on information collected by the Secret Intelligence Service (SIS), Indian Political Intelligence (IPI), Special Branch, and the India Office, the conclusion could be drawn that the Soviets were not holding up their end of the trade agreement and were sponsoring communist activity in the British Empire (particularly in India) via the Comintern and the Narkomindel. Much of the intelligence was based on material fed to SIS by the Narkomindel and on intercepted correspondence. It is clear that there was a very real fear, even if it appears that the “menace” was somewhat overstated.³⁵ The constraining aspects of the trade agreement were not, it seemed, working as effectively as the British government had hoped, and in particular the India Office.

The “anti-Bolshevik committee,” as it came to be known, was established in part as a result of the efforts of Edwin Montagu, secretary of state for India (1917–22), who in June 1921 had written to several departments about the need for cooperation to counter the spread of Soviet propaganda and potential military action.³⁶ Montagu’s calls conspicuously coincided with the Third Comintern Congress, and the urgency that he expressed appears to have stemmed in part from intelligence reports concerning the nature of the discussions taking place in Moscow. The committee met several times during July and August 1921, but concluded that there was insufficient basis for a rupture in relations with the Soviets; they decided that action should not be entered into hastily, as they were keen that the Soviets not discover from whence they had gathered their intelligence.³⁷

Nonetheless, there were some shifts in behaviour following the conclusion of the Anglo-Soviet Trade Agreement. In April 1921, the Comintern’s Maloe Buro decided to liquidate its work among Indians in Tashkent and the CPI moved to Moscow; all talk disappeared of the military invasion of India that Roy had planned.³⁸ In Moscow, rivalries and polarization begun in Tashkent among those calling themselves Indian revolutionaries resurfaced. Roy’s adventurism, integrity, understanding of the situation in India, desire for individualist leadership, insistence that the CPI must be an émigré organization, and his programme were challenged in the run-up to the Third Congress of the Comintern. The Comintern responded that only the CPI would be listened to on Indian affairs.³⁹

Despite all criticisms of ineffectualness with regard to India, the Congress made little comment on colonial affairs. Yet it became apparent that only the CPI was prepared to operate along communist lines, and the Comintern accordingly chose to recognize it as the only existing Indian communist party and expend effort to develop it into a “real Communist Party with a solid footing in India.”⁴⁰ Roy remained the key Comintern figure on Indian affairs, at least in part owing to his favourable, and somewhat over-optimistic, reports of the progress of the Indian communist movement. By September 1921 Roy claimed that the CPI had a membership of “more than thirty,” twenty-one of whom were being trained in the Communist University for the Toilers of the East (KUTV) and were expected to be ready to be sent to India by the end of 1921. He also claimed that several members of the CPI had been sent to India to begin organization and agitation work in

India. Even so, he acknowledged that at this point CPI activity could not go beyond the organization of a “well-knit pioneer group” and the laying of the theoretical foundations of the Indian movement.⁴¹

After the Third Congress, the CPI started to make some headway. While squabbles between the Indian revolutionaries were not completely put aside, the CPI shifted to being the sole organization with which the Comintern had an official relationship, even though, at this stage, it was still not a member section of the Comintern. Emphasizing this problem, Roy, following the Third Congress, argued that it was necessary to move his base of operations to Europe. The Tashkent option was no longer workable, and Moscow was not suitable as far as Roy was concerned. Firstly, it did not have a sufficiently good state of communications with India, and Moscow saw the work in India as “too insignificant in relation to the other activities of the Comintern” to give the CPI proper support. Secondly, Europe was selected because its imperial ports afforded good opportunities to send propaganda literature to India. Thirdly, there were Indian émigrés in Europe who might strengthen the CPI, but would not come to Moscow for fear of being unable to return to India. Berlin, therefore, was selected as the new base of operations for Roy’s organization. By necessity, the Soviet approach to India was functioning transnationally.⁴²

From Berlin, Roy started to make concrete gains. These were not all of his own making, as late 1921 and early 1922 also marked a turning point in the Indian struggle for independence. The tide was moving even more against the British, although we should be clear that this had little to do with the communists and far more to do with a shift in the Indian National Congress (INC). Not only was there a change in attitude, but the nationalist movement also underwent something of a crisis in early 1922. Gandhi was arrested and imprisoned for his leadership of the non-cooperation movement, effectively bringing it to an end. Tactically, the INC and the nationalists were at sea, and looking for a new approach. The nascent communist movement capitalized on the situation, sensing that they might influence the direction that the INC would take now that the nationalist movement was seemingly at a crossroads. When Roy began fortnightly publication of *The Vanguard* in Berlin, which was sent to India from May 1922, India was highly susceptible to communist propaganda, and the paper had a significant impact. It was almost immediately proscribed in India, but Cecil Kaye, director of the Intelligence Bureau, attributed Malayapuram Singaravelu Chettiar’s and Shripad Amrit

Dange's interest in communism and their opening of contact with Roy to the introduction of *The Vanguard* into British India.⁴³

The year 1922 marked the penetration of the CPI and the Comintern into India. In 1921, following the Third Congress of the Comintern, Nalini Gupta was sent to India by Matyas Rakosi of the Comintern's Maloe Buro, and Charles Ashleigh was sent by the CPGB.⁴⁴ As far as Kaye was concerned, this marked the "opening of the campaign" against India by the Comintern, noting that the individuals sent had all received training in Moscow or Tashkent.⁴⁵ While Ashleigh was detained on arrival in Bombay, Gupta was successful in his mission, and reported back in March 1922 that the CPI had been established in India: it had a membership of 2,000, and centres in Calcutta under Muzaffar Ahmed, in Bombay under Dange, and in Madras under Singaravelu.⁴⁶ Shaukat Usmani arrived in India in April 1922, further bolstering the network of agents in India, and the British concluded by May of the same year that there were twenty-two "trained Bolshevik agents" operating within India or about to be dispatched.⁴⁷ Usmani's reporting on his work in India and meeting with other revolutionaries, particularly in Calcutta, were transmitted back not only to Roy and the Comintern, but also to Tom Bell of the CPGB.⁴⁸ Roy, reporting to the Comintern, gave the middle of 1922 as the point at which Comintern work began in India, claiming to have sent seventeen agents and citing *The Vanguard* as instrumental in the process of forging intellectual cadres for a future communist party.⁴⁹ The European Bureau, under Roy in Berlin, directed all Comintern work in India from this point onwards, although it was becoming clear that communist elements were developing in India.⁵⁰ What is important, though, is that it was Berlin that was important to the direction of the Indian communist movement at this stage, not Moscow. Despite the rise of the colonial question within the Comintern in the years following the Second Congress, it still remained a peripheral issue for Moscow.

There was further collusion between the Comintern and the Narkomindel in this period and afterwards. In a letter from Fedor Raskol'nikov, the Soviet Ambassador to Kabul, to Georgy Safarov, the Eastern Secretary of the Comintern, and into which Chicherin was copied, details of the direction and success of activity towards India were plainly given, along with clear lines for how the Narkomindel was to render assistance.⁵¹ At the same time, Raskol'nikov raised the funding for revolutionary activity in Kabul

to 15,000 gold rubles and stepped up the role of the Kabul Embassy as a centre for anti-British revolutionary activity.⁵² Notably, in 1922, Chicherin pointed out that Soviet Eastern policy had become one of challenging imperial and colonial rule, and the Eastern Department of the Comintern echoed the same, making sure that the British heard that their proclamation of challenging India was part of a programme of the “confrontation with England.”⁵³

By the autumn of 1922, Roy had established an organization in India, informing the Comintern Colonial Commission on 11 November 1922 that the Central Committee of the Indian Communist Party had been established at Bombay, and that he was in contact with individuals in Calcutta, Bombay, Lahore, Madras and French Pondicherry.⁵⁴ Grigory Zinoviev, Chairman of the ECCI, reported the formation of an organized communist party in India in *INPRECOR* on 16 November.⁵⁵ The movement suffered a setback in December 1922, where ten Indian Muslims who had been trained in Tashkent and Moscow and had been arrested crossing the border into India via the “Afghan Corridor,” were accused of “conspiracy to deprive the King Emperor of the Sovereignty of British India.”⁵⁶ Nine of these men were members of the émigré CPI, and seven were convicted at Peshawar in May 1923, having confessed to being sent to India as Roy’s agents. Only a few were particularly significant figures in the communist movement in India. From the British point of view the group was only centred around Chamarkand, although Roy described them as “the boys sent back from Moscow” in his report.⁵⁷ Here, Roy highlighted the fact that the Comintern’s challenge to India rested on training Indians in Moscow and Europe and then having them cross back into India to build networks and disseminate propaganda.

Although Roy had established a network in India by this point, there were certain problems. His desire to control the movement tightly and personally, and his insistence that the CPI must be led from outside India, were at the root of them, as was a breakdown in relations with some of his former comrades in Berlin. The greatest problem was created by Mukherji, one of the founders of the CPI in Tashkent in 1920, who travelled to India in 1922 and there denounced Roy as a spy and profiteer, causing considerable harm to Roy’s movement and arousing the interest of the GPU and British Intelligence.⁵⁸ Roy’s network functioned transnationally, leaving a paper trail of letters between his headquarters in Berlin and his agents in India. The

British intercepted these and subsequently used them as the evidence to support their case against the accused in the Cawnpore Conspiracy Case of 1924 in which M.N. Roy and others were tried for conspiracy against the government (to be explained later in this chapter).⁵⁹

By May 1923, Roy's network had become fairly well established. Still, though, there was no real communist party in India. Accordingly, Roy instructed Shaukat Usmani in a letter of 8 March 1923 to begin organizing the network of agents in India into a party, and to make plans for a conference.⁶⁰ On 18 April 1923 in a letter to Safarov, the Secretary of the Eastern Section of the Comintern, Roy stated: "If we do not want to confine ourselves to mere propaganda, but desire to facilitate the organization inside the country of active communist groups, it is necessary, first of all, to find some representative of the Executive able and competent to establish himself in India as the centre and nucleus for all our secret work, and second, to maintain a constant courier service between Central Europe and India."⁶¹ Notably, though, even in the expression of a desire to establish an organization within India, Roy clung to the transnational aspects of the approach to challenging British rule in India.

Having intercepted the above letter from Roy to Usmani, amongst others, on the eve of the fusion of Roy's scattered elements in India, the British struck on two fronts in May 1923. Almost simultaneously, Curzon's ultimatum to the Soviet government was issued, mass arrests were launched against communist conspirators in India, and Roy and RCL Sharma were branded as absconders in French Pondicherry, with a view to putting an end to Bolshevik agitation in India.

The Curzon Ultimatum on 8 May 1923 accused the Soviets, *inter alia*, of revolutionary activity against the British Empire in India, and came with correct details of what that activity comprised. While some have dismissed the Curzon Ultimatum as merely a "raucous outburst," and others have placed it into the context of a continuum of "silent conflict" during the 1920s, a re-examination of what Curzon was attempting with the note to the Soviets on 8 May 1923 is merited.⁶² Curzon's intentions were somewhat different from those traditionally attributed to him. Curzon sought to use the ultimatum as a means to achieve two clear ends, rather than the one that is more commonly argued. In part, he was attempting to use the threat of a rupture in relations to control Soviet behaviour, but he was also trying to use the ultimatum as a lever to shut down domestic communist activity in the subcontinent by gaining vital evidence for a judicial process.

Curzon very much needed to prove that the challenge to India was transnational and did not have its roots within India.

In 1923 and 1924, Curzon played the British hand much more strongly than he had in autumn 1921. He was not handicapped by the earlier hesitation about revealing the extent of British intelligence-gathering that had held back Montagu's committee in 1922. He did this because he had two problems – Soviet-led activity aimed at India, and, more pressingly, a desperate need to prove Soviet involvement in a conspiracy with Indian communists following Gandhi's arrest in 1922. There can be no doubt that the Soviets were, both directly and indirectly, violating the Anglo-Soviet Trade Agreement. The Curzon Ultimatum constituted not only a threat of a rupture in relations between the Soviet and British governments, but also an attempt to gain concrete proof that communist activity in India was being directed by the Soviets. Such evidence was vital to the prosecution of Indian communists accused of conspiring towards revolution in India, with a trial about to reach conclusion and mass arrests of the key figures set to begin the very day after Curzon issued his ultimatum.⁶³

The British, clearly, did believe that the Soviets were behind propaganda against them in India. They were also aware, however, that this activity would be blamed on the Comintern and that despite the reality, the Soviet government would cling to the claim that they had no link with that body and protest their innocence. That the Comintern was directing its challenge to India via Roy in Berlin, and the British could not prove that his orders originated in Moscow, posed a further problem. However, by 1923 the British were increasingly aware that there was a real communist organization in India, albeit a very small collection of communists (all of whom the British had identified) with links to Moscow, largely via Roy in Europe. The one thing they could not do, however, was prove the link back to Moscow – a point which the British needed to resolve due to their decision to rely on archaic Indian legal code from 1818 to confront Indian communism. The crux of the indictments of Indian communists rested on the British ability to prove a link to a foreign power's involvement in a "conspiracy to deprive the King Emperor of the sovereignty of British India." When Curzon issued the ultimatum, the first of what became a series of conspiracy cases had just concluded – the Peshawar (also known as the Moscow-Tashkent) Conspiracy Case of 1923. Those indicted at Peshawar were of little significance to the nascent Indian communist movement, centring on a group of émigrés caught crossing

into India in Chamarkand, although the British were able to prove that they had spent time in Moscow and believed that they had received some training there. That trial was followed, however, by the Cawnpore (Kanpur) Conspiracy Case in 1924, which centred around Roy's communist network in India, every member of which was arrested in the days following the issuing of the Curzon Ultimatum. The prosecutor of the case made it plain that the only way to prove the case against Roy (labelled in *absentia* as an absconder) and his network was to prove the involvement of the Soviet government in the conspiracy. These conspiracy trials centred on the notion of a verifiable, if (in practical terms) somewhat undeveloped, conspiracy against the British government in India. The Peshawar Conspiracy Case resulted in the conviction of thirteen individuals on 18 May 1923, but failed to conclusively prove the involvement of an external power, although some did admit to being Roy's agents. The Peshawar case was limited in scope, and did not indicate a widespread conspiracy of the sort implied by the Cawnpore case. Curzon was well aware that a lack of British action had led to the case not being able to prove the conspiracy involved the Soviets.⁶⁴

When viewed in the context of the Curzon Ultimatum, the timing and faltering of the Peshawar case is striking, as is the mass arrest of Roy's network in early May 1923. When Curzon issued the note to the Soviet government on 8 May, the British government in India did have evidence of a Bolshevik-led conspiracy from which they inferred Soviet efforts against India in violation of the trade agreement of 1921.⁶⁵ British intelligence, through intercepting Roy's letters, had found evidence of what they believed to be a dangerous network of individuals whom they were able to neutralize.⁶⁶

The point here is that the British could prove a Bolshevik conspiracy against India, but they could not make a concrete link back to Moscow in 1923. Roy's involvement, shown in the letters used as evidence in the case, clearly demonstrated the role he played, and revealed a programme aimed at the overthrow of British rule in India. Even so, the evidence only went back as far as Roy and the conspiracy was branded as involving an organization coordinated by him. The British could not, and did not attempt to, prove a link to Moscow, despite the fact that it was well known that Roy had close links to the Comintern and the evidence admitted in the case suggested that the link was there. Roy's base of activity in Europe, therefore, played into the hands of the Soviets in this case. It could be proved that a

conspiracy existed with Roy as its key figure; it could not be conclusively shown that it was directed from Moscow.

That the case was an attempt to prove the link back to Moscow shows the clearest impact of the Curzon Ultimatum. It failed to curtail Bolshevik propaganda in India, which “continued unabated” with no “reliable information suggesting [its] cessation.”⁶⁷ The British note did, though, result in the collapse of Roy’s network and the failure of his schemes for party development. His arrest plainly led to setbacks. In the British analysis Roy was portrayed as “out of touch and impatient, and insisting on his own programme and control by Moscow.”⁶⁸ Attacking the development of communism in India was, from the British point of view, about addressing the transnational nature of the movement more than it was about attacking an under-developed national-based movement in India.

The complaint drafted by the British for the Cawnpore Conspiracy Case showed their understanding of the transnationality of the challenge they faced, and their acknowledgement that only by addressing it in a transnational context could they hope to check it. The CPI had a limited national base in India. But, proceeding cautiously, the British could trace a link back to Moscow:

That there was in India an organization, the headquarters of which were in Europe, the objects of which were to deprive the King of the sovereignty of British India and to overawe, by means of criminal force, the Government of India, and also to bring into hatred and contempt and to excite disaffection towards the government established by law in British India.

That the said organization was controlled by an Indian who called himself Manabendra Nath Roy and whose Headquarters were in Berlin from which place, as well as from other places, he corresponded with various members of the organization who resided in India.

That, with a view to furthering the aforesaid objects, the said Roy communicated, by means of letters, with certain of His Majesty’s subjects who resided in India and also introduced into India newspapers, circulars and pamphlets.⁶⁹

The successful prosecution of the Cawnpore Conspiracy Case meant that it established the existence of a communist conspiracy involving the Soviets, at least in the minds of the British.⁷⁰ They thereby acknowledged that Indian communism was the product of Soviet

activity, highlighting that communism was a transnational threat to India and the British Empire.⁷¹

CONCLUSION

The Soviet challenge to British India was, in this first phase, inherently transnational in approach and intention. And so it was perceived by the British. The Soviets wanted to foment revolution in India as part of a broader strategy that focused on their desire for a European revolution. India thus fit with their broader anti-imperialist ideology. In part, therefore, revolution in India was a means to an end rather than the main goal for the Soviet state – they still thought in European terms. The discussions surrounding the colonial question at the First Comintern Congress suggest their continuing European fixation. Despite this, they recognized that there was a clear desire for colonial peoples to cast off their imperial overlords. Most of the individuals from the colonial world with whom the Soviets had contact belonged to émigré groups. That much of the Soviets' anti-colonial work was by necessity conducted from the outside of colonial spaces was, in large part, a result of their impenetrability. Only by reaching in from outside could the Soviets, and indeed other anti-colonial groups, make any ground.

Transnationality became unavoidable, then, in this context. All of the Indians that the Bolsheviks encountered, either directly or indirectly, had already crossed the border out of India. The key figures that they listened to on India were all émigrés. The émigré situation clearly resonated with many figures within the new Soviet government, who had themselves lived in exile in the years before the Russian Revolution. The normality, therefore, of working transnationally with regard to India was not something the Bolsheviks questioned. Such work almost had to proceed in such a manner. That the Soviets could not penetrate India directly meant that they had to rely on the networks of émigrés in order to challenge British rule in the subcontinent. Thus transnationality became embedded in both the Soviet and the Comintern approach to India. When Roy insisted that the challenge could *only* be coordinated by an émigré CPI and directed from outside, it was taken on board by the Comintern as being a logical condition of the pursuit of communism in India.

In a similar vein, the British addressed the challenge in transnational terms. For them, Bolshevism was something alien to their empire, and could only be something that was transplanted by other powers or

agents intending to challenge their hold. As such, the British saw the Bolshevik challenge in much the same way that they had the Russian Empire's threat to their interests during the nineteenth century: it crossed multiple frontiers, involved intrigue with local groups, and could be addressed via diplomacy. The threat to India, in their minds, could be controlled by attempting to constrain the Soviets and have them desist from revolutionary attempts to undermine the British Empire. While they made moves to this end, notably with the Anglo-Russian Trade Agreement, these efforts were less than entirely successful. Not only were the Soviets unlikely to relinquish their desire for colonial revolution, but they needed to maintain the threat to Britain in Central Asia to keep the British actively engaged with them. If the Soviets let the British think they had "won" the Great Game, the British would have little incentive to maintain trade and diplomatic relations with the Soviets.

With the British unable to compel the Soviets to cease their attempts to challenge their power in India, they resorted to archaic legal codes that specifically addressed a transnationally oriented attempt to "deprive the King Emperor of the sovereignty of British India." The surveillance of the nascent Indian communist movement was based entirely on the fact that the movement was demonstrably being directed, and indeed had been forged, from outside, with agents and material being sent surreptitiously into India. The legal cases constructed to check the spread of communism within India rested on the ability to prove that outside powers were involved in the spread of communism to India and were being directed from Berlin and Moscow. Here, the Curzon Ultimatum fits as an attempt to join up the necessary points to prove the transnational nature of the Soviet challenge to the British Empire in the early 1920s.

To conclude, when looking at the Soviet challenge to British India in the period 1917–1923 we see a multi-agency and multi-vectored approach that crossed continents. The Soviets considered this to be a transnational challenge and so crafted the agencies and agents designed to meet it. Using the Comintern and the Narkomindel, the Soviets were able to use organizations that were already inherently transnational in their operations and couple this with a keen understanding that such a manner of working was key to the realization of their needs. Similarly, the British saw the threat in transnational terms. Communism was something distinctly alien to British thinking – a "menace" that could only come from the outside. Accordingly,

using various means, the British identified and attempted to address what they saw as a transnational threat directed by the Soviet government that challenged their power in British India.

NOTES

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- 18 *Vtoroi congress Kominterna* (Moscow, 1934), 105, 143; *The Second Congress of the Comintern. Report of the Proceedings of the Petrograd Session of July 17th and of Moscow Sessions of July 23rd–August 7th 1920* (Moscow, 1920), 145; A. B. Reznikov, *The Comintern and the East: Strategy and Tactics in the National Liberation Movement* (Moscow: Progress, 1978), 26, 60.
- 19 RGASPI, 495.68.5, 2. It should be noted here that this is the same line laid out in Lenin, *Imperialism*, and in repeated propaganda on India.
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- 21 RGASPI, 495.68.12, 12; RGASPI, 495.68.5, 2; Stuart Macintyre, *Imperialism and the British Labour Movement in the 1920s* (London: Journeyman Press, 1975), 10–12; John Callaghan, “Rajani Palme Dutt, British Communism and the Communist Party of India,” *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics* 6, no. 1 (1990), 56.
- 22 The commission was composed of Kobackchaev (Bulgaria), Gillo (France), Weinkopp (Holland), Levi (Germany), Rudianianski (Hungary), Tomann (Austria), Lenin (Russia), Kamenev (Russia), Reed (USA), Maring (Holland and Dutch East Indies), Roy (Mexico), Quelch (Great Britain), Ramsey (Great Britain), Sultan Zade (Persia), N (Ireland), Slanitsky (Turkey), Lai (China), and Pak (Korea), with Maring as secretary. See Joshi and Damodaran, *Documented History of the Communist Movement in India*, 1:214–25.
- 23 FandP Dept, External-A branch, no. 2539-E.A., 19 Oct 1920, Foreign and Political, External – B (secret), July 1921, no. 321, 4, NAI.
- 24 Joshi and Damodaran, *Documented History of the Communist Movement in India*, 1:214–25; John Riddell, ed., *To See the Dawn: Baku, 1920, First Congress of the Peoples of the East* (New York: Pathfinder Books, 1992); Datta Gupta, *Comintern and the Destiny of Communism in India*, 70–1.

- 25 RGASPI, 495.68.37, 68.
- 26 Original members included Roy, Evelyn Trent-Roy (Roy's wife), Mukherji, Rosa Fitting (Mukherji's wife), Mahomed Ali, Siddiqui (Shafiq), and Achariya. The executive committee was initially composed of Achariya as chairman, Shafiq as secretary, and Roy as a member. RGASPI, 495.68.4, 6, 12; RGASPI, 495.68.4, 7; RGASPI, 495.68.4, 8.
- 27 The Cheka was the first iteration of the Russian secret police under Bolshevik rule and would be succeeded by the NKVD and the KGB. RGASPI, 495.68.36, 8; RGASPI, 495.68.31, 3; RGASPI, 495.68.8, 31-2.
- 28 HM Secretary of State for India (HRC Dobbs) to Colonel WFT O'Connor, no. 2203, 30 September 1920, Foreign and Political, M Branch, 61-M/1924, nos. 1-6, 1, NAI; O'Connor to Foreign and Political Department, 26 October 1920, ibid., 3; Enclosure to FandP no. 109 to Edwin Montagu (HM Secretary of State for India), 16 December 1920, ibid.; Surjeet et al., *History of the Communist Movement in India*, 1:49-50.
- 29 *Trade Agreement between His Britannic Majesty's Government and the Government of the Russian Socialist Federal Soviet Republic*, Parliamentary Paper, 1921, cmd. 1207, 2-3. The significant paragraph from the preamble to the trade agreement reads:
- That each party refrains from hostile action or undertakings against the other and from conducting outside of its own borders any official propaganda direct or indirect against the institutions of the British Empire or the Russian Soviet Republic respectively, and more particularly that the Russian Soviet Government refrains from any attempt by military or diplomatic or any other form of action or propaganda to encourage any of the peoples of Asia in any form of hostile action against British interests or the British Empire, especially in India and in the Independent State of Afghanistan. The British Government gives a similar particular undertaking to the Russian Soviet Government in respect of the countries which formed part of the former Russian Empire and which have now become independent.
- 30 "Trade With Red Russia," and "Soviet Plots in the East," *The Times*, 17 March 1921, 11.
- 31 Arthur Marshall, *Memorandum on the Russian Situation and a Suggestion as to British Policy* (London: HMSO, 1927). See the first page of *Arkhiv vnesheini politiki Rossiiskoi Federatsii* (hereafter AVPRF), 069.12.36.22; AVPRF, 04.4.27.384, 19; AVPRF, 069.4.3.1, 1; AVPRF, 069.4.3.1, 3. *Dokumenty vnesheini politiki SSSR* (hereafter DVP SSSR) (Moscow: Izd-vo polit. lit-ry, 1957-1977), 3:639; Evgenii Chossudovsky, *Chicherin*

and the Evolution of Soviet Foreign Policy (Geneva: Graduate Institute of International Studies, 1973), 19; E.H. Carr, *Socialism in One Country* (London: Macmillan, 1978), 3:II:3–6; Kocho-Williams, *Russian and Soviet Diplomacy*, 80.

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- 35 Committee on Bolshevism as a Menace to the British Empire reports are in WO 32/5728 and FO 371/6915/N8922, TNA; Fisher, “The Interdepartmental Committee on Eastern Unrest,” 4–5.
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- 39 RGASPI, 495.68.8, 31; RGASPI, 495.68.32, 1–3; Datta Gupta, *Comintern and the Destiny of Communism*, 38–39; RGASPI, 495.68.46, 1, 3; RGASPI, 495.68.46, 16.
- 40 RGASPI, 495.68.32, 4.
- 41 RGASPI, 495.68.5, 41.
- 42 RGASPI, 495.68.5, 41–2.
- 43 Cecil Kaye, *Communism in India* (London: HMSO, 1924), 15; Sudobh Roy, ed., *Communism in India 1919–1924* (Calcutta: Ganashitiya Prakash, 1972), 14; Surjeet et al., *History of the Communist Movement in India*, 1:60.
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- 52 RGASPI, 495.3.105, 148; Tichonow, “Die Komintern und der ‘afghanische Korridor,’” 316; AVPRF, 090.4.2.7, 1.269.
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- 58 RGASPI, 495.68.69, 107; RGASPI, 495.68.87, 4.
- 59 “Indian Communist Party,” W/HR 95 1.1.23 JandP (S) 6820 – DIB, pp. 5–7, IOR; “IPI on Indian Communist Party” W/PF (82), 2 January 1923, W/HR 95 1.1.23 JandP (S) 6820, 11–20, IOR; “Indian Communist Party,” 12 January 1923 JandP (s) 6925, L/PandJ/12/47, 29, IOR; Roy to Dange, 25 December 1922, L/PandJ/12/47, 36, IOR; “Extract from DIB Weekly Report,” 31 January 1923, L/PandJ/12/47, 87; ICP, 10 May 1923, L/PandJ/12/47, 171, IOR; Intercept of Roy to Dange, 8 March 1923, L/PandJ/12/47, 172, IOR; “Extract from DIB Weekly Report,” 20 June 1923, L/PandJ/12/48 (1923), 26, IOR.
- 60 L/PandJ/12/47, p. 171, IOR.
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- 62 Keith Neilson, *Britain, Soviet Russia and the Versailles Order, 1919–1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 1; Michael Jabara Carley, *Silent Conflict: A Hidden History of Early Soviet-Western Relations* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2014).

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- 64 L/PandJ/12/162, 28–63, 10R; Note from Private Secretary to Governor General of India (J Crerar), 2 June 1923, Home Department, Political Branch, F. no. 261 and K.W., 1924, 1, NAI.
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- 69 Draft of Complaint, (Ross Alston) NAI, Home Political Department, f. no. 261 and K.W., 1924, nos. 1–105, 66–7.
- 70 Kaye, *Communism in India*, 55.
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PART TWO

Transnational Personal Relationships

Los poputchiki

Communist Fellow Travellers, Comintern Radical Networks, and the Forging of a Culture of Modernity in Latin America and the Caribbean

Sandra Pujals

“Life is but a constant journey
through all that Time unravels.
Man may know his birthplace,
yet knows not where he will die.”

Juan Antonio Corretjer

INTRODUCTION

During the first decades of Soviet rule, the term *poputchik* – from the Russian for “fellow traveller” – sometimes disdainfully identified bourgeois communist sympathizers whose ideological commitments were considered too weak to be trusted.¹ However, several works on radical internationalism during the first half of the twentieth century have pointed out the relevance of communist fellow travellers to the Soviet experience, even recognizing the ideological exchange between these two spheres as “one of the most consequential cross-cultural encounters of the twentieth century.”² Recent historiography has also established the significance of fellow traveller organizations, particularly in articulating powerful radical networks that supported and carried out (willingly or unintentionally) some of the Comintern’s social and cultural projects between 1919 and 1943.³ In Latin America

and the Caribbean, for example, more than a thousand individuals, both native and foreign, provided an ideological and practical scaffold for Comintern-supported radical ventures, many of them dependent on communist *poputchiki*.⁴ The extent and dynamic flow of these interactions leave little doubt about the global impact of the Russian Revolution as a people-mover – a transnational phenomenon that defied not only national borders, but even the imagination of those who dreamed of revolution.

This chapter maps the travel itineraries and contributions of several of these *poputchiki* who had a direct or short-lived relationship with international communism. The work focuses on these fellow travellers' contribution to Latin American and Caribbean visions of modernity as a byproduct of their past ideological formation or interaction with the Comintern's international radical network. It offers examples of the sort of transnational cultural exchanges fostered and/or financed by the Comintern's radical networks and its political agents throughout the area. The discussion points out the underlying, sometimes accidental, connections between this interaction and its long-term legacy outside and beyond the political divide. This chapter underscores the Comintern's presence in the region even after its period of activity, while indicating its role in setting up a cultural infrastructure that helped define modernization, decolonization, and democratization processes in the zone between the late 1940s and early 1950s.

Most biographical inquiries tend to disregard a prior communist ideological connection when examining the scholarly, legislative, or artistic contributions of the pioneers of Latin American and Caribbean modernity. Archival records recently recovered, however, highlight the significance of these connections, and the need to take them into consideration. For example, most scholars will either praise Rómulo Betancourt's democratic zeal or reject the communist affiliation of the "Father of Venezuelan Democracy" as a fabrication of his political adversaries during periods of dictatorship.⁵ His government's policies of labour welfare, land reform, and social justice nevertheless resembled elements of the Comintern's Latin American agenda in earlier decades.⁶ Recently discovered documents from the agency's archives in Moscow identify Betancourt as a member of the Communist Party of Costa Rica at the end of the 1920s, and mention his participation in the establishment of Venezuela's communist party, which he later banned in 1961 during his second presidency.⁷

In other instances, historians choose to set aside the effect of a past ideological relationship with communist internationalism when examining the sensibilities and metaphorical content of artistic and cultural contributions. Studies, for example, often downplay ideology in the works of Jamaica's iconic poet and writer Claude McKay, focusing instead on his use of Caribbean elements and his deeply engrained racial consciousness.⁸ Works also underscore his apparent disillusionment with the Soviet regime, which he discussed in his anti-communist memoir *Long Way From Home* (1937), as evidence of an uncompromising, apolitical spirit. A recent book based on McKay's FBI files, however, contends that communist principles enhanced his discourse and remained a defining element of his persona well into the late 1930s. The evidence also confirms his direct relationship with the Soviet Union, and his covert work under the code name "Sasha," a double identity that was as secret as his uncertain sexuality.⁹ As for his ideological impact, new assessments also point out that radical internationalism, and not a limited Caribbean ethnocentrism, accounts for his unique take on art, race, and identity.¹⁰

This chapter uses such evidence not only to demonstrate the legacy of international communism in the region beyond limited political confines, but also to illustrate the unexpected, unchartered consequences of the "Soviet experiment" as a transnational, multicultural, and interactive phenomenon of global proportions. The paper focuses on the lives of several individuals who can be considered contributors to the region's culture of modernity throughout the twentieth century, pointing out their relationship – direct, short-lived, or even accidental – to the Comintern's worldwide radical network. Such vignettes also emphasize this internationalism's intense sense of motion, and the fluidity of cross-cultural radical hubs that extended from Asia, Africa, and Europe into the American hemisphere.¹¹

The Bolshevik Revolution had universal implications. My analysis sharpens our understanding of intricate and even outlandish interconnections between events, people, and places. In addition, it underlines the need of taking fellow travellers' relationship to communist internationalism into account, particularly in view of archival evidence attesting to a past affiliation to the Comintern and Moscow-centred ideological grid.¹² Finally, the discussion confirms the Soviet Union's role as an intellectual centre for educating future leaders in the Caribbean Basin. These leaders – from communists to moderate

populists to staunch nationalists – would later apply their learning experience in the Comintern radical networks to their own aesthetic, cultural, and political definitions of modernity. This chapter thus adds yet another angle to the concept of a “Soviet Caribbean,” contributing instances that exemplify the presence, albeit indirect, of the Soviet Union and Comintern radical networks in the area long before the Cuban Revolution of 1959.¹³

SEKI SANO, THE “FATHER” OF MODERN THEATER IN MEXICO, 1905–1966

Born in Tientsin, China’s Japanese concession, Seki Sano was instrumental in establishing the foundations of popular, modern Japanese theater during the 1920s. He is also recognized as one of Latin America’s great masters of theatrical direction, the “father” of Mexican modern theater, the teacher of a great number of renowned Latin actors and actresses of the 1940s and 1950s, and the founder of Latin America’s most progressive drama school, Mexico’s *Escuela de Artes Escénicas*, according to the Proletarian Theater model.

As a member of a progressive aristocratic family, Sano received a very sophisticated, European education, in which modern values and Western culture, including theater, played a significant role. From an early age, Sano organized and directed theater groups, first in his high school, and later in the law faculty of the Imperial University. Probably as a result of his close relationship with his uncle Manabu Sano, who was a founding member of the original Communist Party of Japan, he soon embraced the idea of theater’s political and ideological utility, particularly as an instrument of social change in traditional Japan.¹⁴ In 1925, at the age of twenty, Sano travelled to the Soviet Union, where he studied with Vsevolod Meyerhold and Konstantin Stanislavski. After his return to Japan, he incorporated both the Stanislavski acting method and several Russian and Soviet theater pieces into his theater group’s repertoire, including a version of A. Lunacharsky’s *Don Quijote Liberated*.¹⁵ In 1926, he organized theatrical agitprop brigades during a major Kyoto print strike, along with a travelling proletarian theater troupe that acted as support group for the strikers.¹⁶ By 1930, he had become a leading figure in the Japanese League of Proletarian Theater, a Comintern-supported organization for the promotion of theater as a tool for workers’ ideological education.¹⁷

Seki Sano's political activism soon attracted the attention of the police authorities, as the regime became fiercely conservative and militarized. In 1931 he was arrested, along with the rest of his theater group, and forced to leave Japan. He settled in Berlin, and later in Moscow, where he became Meyerhold's assistant for several years in a "scientific" experiment to systematize the master director's theatrical practices.¹⁸ As a leading representative in the International Union of Proletarian Theaters, a Comintern front organization managed by the celebrated German director Erwin Piscator, Sano also helped coordinate the 1932 International Workers Revolutionary Theater Olympiad, a competition that brought together proletarian theater groups from around the world.¹⁹

However, by the second half of the 1930s, Sano's support of Bukharin's political stance and his connection to the purged Japanese communists exiled in Moscow had made him a Stalinist target.²⁰ He was fortunate enough to be "expelled" from the Soviet Union in 1937 while in Paris. After a short sojourn in Europe, Sano settled in New York, where he again collaborated with Erwin Piscator, who had also fled Moscow after falling out of grace with Stalin.²¹ Piscator's theatrical project in the Big Apple, the famous Dramatic Workshop of the New School for Social Research (also known as the "New Theater"), gave Sano the opportunity to work with figures such as Tennessee Williams and Arthur Miller, whose works would soon become universally recognized icons of the modern theater.²²

Despite the outstanding international appeal of Sano's work in New York, US immigration authorities refused to grant him safe haven in view of his overt relationship with communist circles, and threatened to deport him. In 1939, Sano received political asylum in Mexico, most likely thanks to his connections with the communist radical network there.²³ At the time, the Mexican government still insisted on neutrality in view of its oil interests, while the country's leftist leaders, large Jewish community, and Comintern-supported organizations called for a declaration of support for the Allies.²⁴ Upon his arrival, Sano began working on a theater project that brought together a variety of popular subjects and stage performances with revolutionary undertones, including Mexico's first modern dance, *La Coronela*.²⁵ The political context of the performance and its nationalist exaltation of the country's radical tradition probably attracted the attention of the political elite, since the piece was included in the succession ceremony for the newly elected president, Manuel Ávila Camacho.²⁶

Although the end of his overt activism seems to have coincided with the liquidation of the Comintern in 1943, Sano remained an outstanding cultural figure, particularly as a result of his drama school, still one of the most important in Latin America today. In 1948, his historic production of Tennessee Williams's *A Streetcar Named Desire* in Spanish is praised as the first modern theater performance in Mexico, and a milestone in the transformation of Latin American theater.²⁷ Most likely, Sano had met the author as a young drama student at Piscator's New York workshop a decade before, and understood the significance of the play as a theatrical landmark.²⁸ His reputation as "the father" of Mexican modern theater also made him the leading director and drama teacher for a whole generation of movie stars from Mexican cinema's "golden age."²⁹ Sano's experience with the Russian theatrical masters, and his observations of social and psychological peculiarities, also contributed to the development of a particularly Latin American approach to performance theory.³⁰

In the second half of the 1950s, Sano's fame as one of the five most important stage directors in the Western hemisphere prompted the Colombian government to invite him to Bogotá to train the actors of its emerging national television programming.³¹ Soon after his arrival in Colombia, he established a small experimental drama school following the model of his academy in Mexico. However, the right-wing regime became alarmed by his ideological background, and asked him to leave after only a few months in the country. Back in Mexico, Sano found it ever more difficult to find support for theater productions in an age of cinema, and slowly faded from the limelight. He remained, nevertheless, the foremost drama teacher until his death in 1966.³²

Today, Seki Sano is honored as an icon and foundation in the history of Latin American theater.³³ The main award for theater critics in Mexico and an important theater hall in Colombia both carry his name. He may have also influenced performing arts in other important cinema and theater hubs in the region, such as Cuba, where he worked for a brief period.³⁴ His bequest even extends to places Sano probably never visited, since his drama school gathered actors and actresses from throughout the Spanish-speaking world and the United States.³⁵

The legacy of his political activism is, however, much more difficult to identify. As in the case of other renowned former fellow travellers in the region, his biographical information tends to either downplay or altogether reject the significance of his communist ties. Nevertheless,

his connections to communists in Europe, New York, and Mexico, and to organizations such as the International Union of Proletarian Theaters and the Mexican League of Revolutionary Writers and Artists, suggest a close interaction with Comintern radical networks and participation in the agency's cultural agenda even after his expulsion from the Soviet Union. His name also appears repeatedly in a random sample of documents of the International Workers' Theater Organization that Piscator managed in Berlin in the early 1930s with Comintern support.³⁶ Sano might have abandoned communist ideology and activity in the strict sense of the word, but the subliminally radical, social content of his productions attest to communist internationalism's legacy beyond the limits of political ideology in a cultural world without borders.³⁷

ARCADY BOYTLER AND MEXICAN CINEMA'S GOLDEN ERA, 1893–1965

Unlike Seki Sano's relationship to the Comintern, Arcady Boytler's connection to communist internationalism's radical network was indirect and serendipitous, to say the least. However, his experience with Russia's revolutionary, artistic, and cultural iconoclasm probably contributed to his keen understanding of Mexico's social atmosphere in the country's transition to modernity. An outstanding director and producer of famous melodramas during Mexico's cinematic golden era, including the country's first talkie blockbuster, *La mujer del puerto* (1934), Boytler is also recognized as the "discoverer" of Latin America's beloved popular comedy icon, Mario Moreno, best known by his artistic name, *Cantinflas*.³⁸

Arcady Boytler was born in 1895 to a well-off and highly educated Moscovite family. He studied drama with important teachers, including Stanislavski, Meyerhold, Vakhtangov, and Nikolai Bailiev. By 1917, Boytler had already produced, directed, and acted in several quirky short films that combined acrobatics, comedy, and absurd situations.³⁹ After 1917, he would work closely with Sergei Yutkevich, Grigory Kozintsev, and Leonid Trauberg in their *avant-garde* cinema group, the "Factory of the Eccentric Actor," and later went to Germany, where he continued to work on experimental films with unconventional subjects and titles such as *Boytler gegen Chaplin* (*Boytler against Chaplin*, 1920) and *Boytler Tötet Langweile* (*Boytler against Boredom*, 1920). He travelled to Chile and Argentina in the mid-1920s, where

he collaborated in performance projects that shared elements of the revolutionary left's cultural stance, such as aesthetic iconoclasm and a belief in art's social utility.⁴⁰

In 1929, Boytler moved to the United States. He worked in movie production in New Jersey, the cinema capital of the early days of movie-making, and then in Hollywood, as a menial assistant in Sergei Eisenstein's movie project for Paramount Pictures.⁴¹ In 1931, he followed Eisenstein's film crew to Mexico. His lean body, long legs, and acrobatic skills landed him a job as a Day of the Dead masked skeleton in the *Fiesta* section of Eisenstein's unfinished masterpiece, *;Que Viva México!* After the sudden end of the project, Boytler stayed behind in Mexico, and returned to avant-garde experimentation in several short films that combined poignant social messages with humor and irony. He also integrated Eisenstein's cinematographic application of Marxist dialectics to his own aesthetic, particularly the fusion of contrasting elements and media into a visual synthesis. The combination of unconventional film components such as acrobatic antics, dance, and circus performance, and theater, nightclub or carnival as metaphoric stages for reality, would become iconic features in his later films. His 1932 experimental piece *El expectador impertinente* (*The Obnoxious Spectator*) added live performance to the film, as Boytler climbed on the stage to interrupt the movie, acting as a disgruntled heckler who disrespectfully confronted people in the audience. He later appeared in a romantic scene in the movie, along with the woman he had heckled in the audience from the stage.⁴²

In 1934, Boytler became an outstanding cinema personality in Mexico as the director of the country's second, and very successful, "talkie," *La mujer del puerto* (*The Woman From the Port*). The musical melodrama with intense social messages included Latin America's future musical idol, Agustín Lara, at the time still an unknown composer, in a small role as a bar pianist – another example of Boytler's keen eye when choosing his subjects and actors. Two comedy blockbusters in 1937, *Águila o sol* (*Heads or Tails*) and *Así es mi tierra* (*Such Is My Country*), won Boytler recognition as a director and producer, and opened the way for their main character's cinematographic success. Already a popular entertainer in a Russian *carpa* (tent or big top), Cantinflas's socially irreverent and iconoclastic comedy act in *Aguila o sol* served as the antithesis and ironic component in a mostly superfluous melodrama of love and redemption. In the film, however, the part of the *carpa* sketch where a very

intoxicated and love-struck Cantinflas sang and complained to his drunk comedy partner Manuel Mendel, was moved to the bedroom that the two shared. The daring homoerotic scene included a zany fistfight and acrobatic stunts, as the roommate attempted to undress Cantinflas and bring him to bed. The overt allusions may have been another of Boytler's concealed iconoclastic critiques against Mexico's social establishment, particularly its hypocritical cult of *machismo* as national identity. The title of the film itself, which referred to the two sides of a Mexican coin, perhaps also subliminally posed a question concerning sexual preferences.

While in the first movie, Cantinflas's makeup and hair suggested his *pierrot*-like, *carpa* clown persona, the second film's plot highlighted his role as a savvy underdog whose insouciance about authority and social rules could undermine society's traditional power structure. In addition, *Así es mi tierra* subverted the traditional cinematic genres of both the Mexican revolutionary epic and the *Don Quijote* romantic adventure, as a scruffy Cantinflas on a donkey heroically helps save the townsfolk from its despotic and corrupt aristocratic masters. As in the previous film, the *machismo* aspect – this time represented by the general and his soldiers – was again the subject of cheeky mocking by a sometimes slightly effeminate, hip-swaying Cantinflas. Interestingly enough, the fact that a foreigner seemed to be ridiculing one of the country's iconic cultural representations was never an issue. On the contrary, the movie and its shabby hero won universal success in Latin American popular culture.⁴³

Cantinflas and Boytler never worked together after 1937, but their collaboration afforded both of them an outstanding role in the history of Mexican cinema's golden age.⁴⁴ Until the late fifties, Boytler – or the "Russian rooster," as his friends called him – remained a celebrated movie producer with close connections to Hollywood. He never returned to the daring, experimental iconoclasm of his early years, opting for very conventional subjects and technique instead. He also owned an important movie theater in the country's capital, which added to his social status as an international cinema entrepreneur.

Boytler's ideological sensibility is still something of a mystery, an overlooked *mise en scène* and hardly explored subplot in his work. He was probably never enticed by the political crusades that exemplified communist internationalism's cultural agenda for Latin America. After all, he had chosen to leave Russia because of the Bolshevik revolutionary turmoil. On the other hand, he did not seem to mind

joining the Soviet Union's cultural envoy, Sergei Eisenstein, and his Soviet crew in their exodus to Mexico. In addition, his close and lasting friendship with staunch local communists such as Diego Rivera's partner, Frida Kahlo, dated back to his early days in Mexico with Eisenstein.⁴⁵ It is highly unlikely that, if Boytler had truly rejected communism's ideological nuances, he would have consented to participate in Eisenstein's Mexican adventure, or join him and other overt Mexican communists in the journeys and artistic gatherings that accompanied the making of the film.⁴⁶

In Boytler's case, aesthetic considerations probably preceded political subjectivity. He may have rejected the constraints of Marxist orthodoxy, but his movies, at least his early productions, suggested a dialectical fusion of social contradictions encapsulated in a shared reality, with a consequential synthesis as a plot resolution. They also seemed to share communism's more generic, iconoclastic cultural undercurrent of opposition to authority, social injustice, and traditional caste systems, as showcased in his Cantinflas films. His plots and scripts lacked obvious allusions to the political features of communist ideology, but universal aspects such as the defiance of bourgeois institutions and sensibilities, and the celebration of underdog empowerment, infused the scene with a subliminal radicalism.⁴⁷

For Boytler, as for many communist fellow travellers in the artistic world, revolution was probably not an ideological or political endeavour, but rather a cultural statement, one that challenged the arrogance of intellectual or social elitism and the established order's perpetuation of abuse and inequality. Being "revolutionary" was more an attitude and a lifestyle than a stance defined by a political position. Although his later films focused on more mundane and traditional subjects, his early Mexican works were, no doubt, meant to address the hypocrisy of the bourgeois social environment and rules. In *Águila o sol*, two babies – one rich and one poor – are left at the doors of a convent school for abandoned children on the same day. Despite their different social backgrounds, the two children share the same appalling destiny as scorned orphans, and later, as homeless children roaming in the streets.

In addition, Boytler's careful selection of protagonists for his early comedies contributed another revolutionary element to the Latin American cultural experience by highlighting the role of the urban industrial worker, not only as a popular hero, but also as a new, more modern collective identity. Its comic appeal, impudence, and irony – vintage Boytler cinema essentials since his early years in Russia –

became part of a universal lexicon that could resonate with most every strata of the social spectrum. While he was only a former *poputchik* of the Soviet Union's priceless cultural export, Sergei Eisenstein, Boytler's bequest to Mexican and Latin American cultural standards of modernity represents a most unusual, incidental legacy of communist internationalism's own golden era.

ÁNGEL DEL RÍO AND *DON QUIJOTE* FOR A NEW MILLENNIUM

Ángel del Río, prominent professor of Spanish literature at Columbia University and New York University between the 1930s and the 1960s, is best remembered for his works on Spain's outstanding contributions to world literature, particularly his treatment of *Don Quijote* as an ageless, universal classic.⁴⁸ Along with his colleague at Columbia, the also renowned Spanish academician Federico de Onís, del Río was instrumental in the formulation of the graduate curriculum for Hispanic Literary Studies and the establishment of the first departments of Hispanic Studies in several universities, including Columbia and the University of Puerto Rico. Recently discovered archival documentation identifies him as a *poputchik* in the Communist Party of Spain in his youth, and an obscure collaborator in communist internationalism's radical network in the Caribbean for a brief period in the mid-1920s.⁴⁹ His literary analysis of Miguel de Cervantes's *Don Quijote de la Mancha*, one of del Río's earliest academically acclaimed publications, underscored the work's significance and timelessness as a point of departure and foundation for social, cultural, and philosophical concepts of modernity.⁵⁰ The article's theoretical focus on the fusion of visual, thematic, and social contradictions in the *Quijote*, however, may have been the vestiges of del Río's intellectual encounter with Marxist dialectics.

Ángel del Río was born in Soria, Spain in 1901. He moved to Madrid to study philosophy and letters at the Madrid University, where he also received his doctorate in 1924.⁵¹ Between 1921 and 1929, he travelled extensively as a visiting professor, teaching at the University of Strasbourg (1921–23), then at the University of Puerto Rico (1925–26) and the Florida University (1926–28).⁵² In 1929, he was invited to join Columbia's academic community by Federico de Onís, del Río's mentor and director of that university's Spanish department. Throughout the next three decades, the two scholars

collaborated on a number of academic and cultural projects to promote Hispanic culture and Spanish literature in the United States and Latin America. They also established New York's prestigious Hispanic Institute and several of Columbia's academic journals, such as *Revista Hispánica Moderna* and *Boletín del Instituto de las Españas*.

In the early 1950s, del Río organized the Spanish Summer Language Program for Middlebury College, as well as a graduate school for Spanish in Madrid attached to that college's illustrious language program. He was also part of the editorial boards of very prominent academic journals, such as *Romanic Review*, *Publication of Modern Languages Association (PMLA)*, *Books Abroad Symposium*, and of international associations such as the *Instituto de Estudios Asturianos* and the Hispanic Society of America.⁵³ In 1959, he received impressive grants from both the Guggenheim and Fulbright institutions to carry out a research project that was never finished. He died of lung cancer in 1962, as he was about to begin his tenure as a visiting professor at the Sorbonne in Paris.

As a distinguished professor at Columbia University, Ángel del Río had a leading role in conservative intellectual institutions in the Spanish exile community, and those representing the Hispanic social elite, such as the *Ateneo Hispano-American* in Washington, D.C. Recently discovered archival material, however, identifies him as a self-proclaimed member of the Spanish Communist Party in his youth, as well as collaborator in early Comintern-related activity in Puerto Rico between 1926 and 1927, under his party moniker "Leandro Cabrera."⁵⁴ In addition, the format and tone of one of his letters written to James Sager, a communist agent he had previously met in Puerto Rico, suggest that the communication was meant to serve as a report, and an ideological calling card: "almost all of the members of the [Central] Committee (three of them chosen directly by Moscow) spend most of the time in Paris running away from the [Spanish] police."⁵⁵ According to del Río, their absence had a positive effect since it served to "purge the party, cleanse it of toxic members, and establish good discipline."⁵⁶

Apparently, del Río was hoping to win Sager's support in order to get hired by a Comintern front organization in Mexico, the Anti-Imperialist League of the Americas (LADLA).⁵⁷ His letters not only implied a knowledge of Marxist theory, but also attested to his ideological commitment. In one of his letters, for example, he addressed Sager as "Dear Comrade," and spoke of the Spanish Communist Party as "our party," which according to del Río "was meant to become

one of the leading ones in Europe.”⁵⁸ His last letter to Sager also confirmed his skill when speaking “Soviet”: he pompously declared that once all of Central America supported Augusto Sandino’s struggle against the United States occupation of Nicaragua, the region’s anti-imperialist efforts would be well on their way to becoming “a truly proletarian mass movement.”⁵⁹ He ended his letter with the iconic farewell that had already begun to distinguish communist official communication: “*Con saludos comunistas.*”⁶⁰

After his letter in March 1927, Ángel del Río and James Sager probably never communicated again. Sager left Puerto Rico soon after, and embarked on an anti-imperialist “mission” to Colombia until his deportation in the early 1930s.⁶¹ By 1929, del Río had moved to New York to teach at Columbia; the publication of several articles had granted him immediate recognition as an outstanding young scholar among the Spanish academic community.⁶² In one of the essays on *Don Quijote*, del Río argued in favour of the contemporary relevance of the novel as a “modern” rather than “medieval” text.⁶³ The work, published in the journal his mentor had just established at the University of Puerto Rico, turned del Río into the leader of a revisionist literary movement in favour of a modern reading of the work, and the foremost representative of a contemporary generation of academics in a newly established discipline: *Estudios Cervantinos*.⁶⁴

Although del Río’s essay proposed a new reading of Cervantes’s masterpiece, suggesting its symbolic, philosophical, and metaphorical context in modern terms, his approach seemed to include certain Marxist analytical elements. For example, he incorporated subtle suggestions of a dialectical approach to the literary analysis of the work, insinuating a confrontation of contradicting social forces represented by Don Quijote and Sancho and the resulting synthesis as a resolution to the plot.⁶⁵ In the discussion, del Río addressed Spain’s backwardness as a historical and cultural issue, and its relationship to Spanish scholars’ archaic, medievalist approach to *Don Quijote* and to literature and writing in general. A Marxist optic seemed to influence del Río’s observations concerning the medieval aspects of Spain’s decrepit and lusterless contemporary literature. The social context of a new, deeper understanding of the work in nineteenth-century European intellectual circles also betrayed a somewhat Marxist approximation of historical stages of evolution: “The new [Romantic] literary dogma, a bourgeois dogma in its core, could not find roots in Spain, where only vile aristocrats remained.”⁶⁶

The article's concluding remarks returned to the common denominator that made the *Quijote*, according to del Río, not only a masterpiece throughout the centuries, but one that reflected the reality and experience of modernity: "The conflict of the *Quijote* is the conflict of our time. Never has the conflict between the ideal and the reality been so acute ... We find ourselves in a moment of contradiction and duality, product of the clash between two civilizations. One sees a new civilization ascending [into power], a new civilization that [little by little] destroys our beliefs."⁶⁷

While the discussion focused strictly on philosophical and literary aspects, his final comments may have also been sly references to Spain's historical moment, during a period of escalating radicalism and political strife. Fortunately, according to the author, Spain had chosen to "stand still at the crossroads" in order to reach a new stage: "An hour of great syntheses is this one, and in it can the Spanish soul experience the satisfaction of a definite victory."⁶⁸

After his brief adventure as a communist fellow traveller, which he seemed to connect metaphorically to his student days in Madrid as a "[militant] in the drifting army of a scruffy and raggedy, Bohemian [existence]," Ángel del Río probably stepped away from radical politics and ideology for good.⁶⁹ His experience, however, may have contributed a philosophical and analytical framework within which the *Quijote* can be understood as a dialectical literary model and a modern synthesis. Despite the apparently minor significance of del Río's brief collaboration in the radical network in the Americas, his story serves as another example of the unpredictable historical nooks and crannies that international communism offers, beyond the structured ideological and political histories of its heyday as a global phenomenon.

JAMES SAGER AND PUERTO RICO'S POLITICAL EVOLUTION TOWARDS DEMOCRATIC RULE

James Sager's radical venture as head of the Puerto Rican section of the Anti-Imperialist League of the Americas (LADLA) between 1925 and 1927, while brief and mostly inconsequential, provided certain elements to the island's political and ideological infrastructure at a crucial period of evolution in the 1930s and 1940s.⁷⁰ The Puerto Rican nationalist blueprint for an independent movement with an anti-imperialist, international scope, for example, was most likely the legacy of Sager's persistent communication with local nationalist

leaders, particularly with the Nationalist Party vice-president, Pedro Albizu Campos. Scholarship related to Albizu Campos and Puerto Rican nationalism identifies the period of 1926–27 as a starting point for a new stage in the party's ideological consolidation, pointing out Albizu Campos's agency in bringing about an internationalization of the movement.⁷¹ Changes in the subject matter and focus of the party's organ, *El Nacionalista de Ponce*, are particularly indicative of the "new nationalism" that Albizu supposedly contributed.⁷² However, most of the articles in the *El Nacionalista* that are cited as evidence, such as those denouncing the US intervention in Nicaragua and other parts of the region, or those discussing the 1927 Anti-Colonialist Conference in Brussels, were actually based on information provided by Sager and his US communist mentor, Charles Phillips (a.k.a. Manuel Gómez).⁷³

Other interesting, uncanny connections between Sager's sojourn and the island's political history confirm the intricate and unexpected interconnections that the Comintern's radical networks left behind. During his first few months in Puerto Rico, Sager was a guest in the home of a young, well-off Puerto Rican by the name of Antonio Colorado, whom Sager had befriended in Boston. Although Sager hoped to coach Colorado for underground work as an infiltrator in the nationalist movement, the latter apparently collaborated in organizing the first communist group in 1926, and soon returned to the United States.⁷⁴ Back in Puerto Rico in the late 1930s, Colorado joined the *Partido Popular Democrático* (PPD) and its charismatic leader, Luis Muñoz-Marín, who orchestrated the transition to constitutional rule and became the island's first democratically elected governor in 1952. A close friend to Colorado, Muñoz-Marín commissioned him to design the iconic logo for the PPD, which included the profile of a Puerto Rican peasant in red, wearing the characteristic straw hat, with the words "*Pan, Tierra y Libertad*".⁷⁵ Not only was the phrase a vintage Comintern slogan, but it was also a carbon copy of the heading of the Puerto Rican communist newspaper *Verdad* (Truth) in the early 1940s.⁷⁶

Two young Puerto Rican nationalist intellectuals involved in Sager's Puerto Rican Section of LADLA also became important political figures later on: Vicente Geigel-Polanco and Samuel R. Quiñones. Geigel-Polanco, a prominent lawyer, intellectual, and one of the closest collaborators in Muñoz Marín's circle, had probably also been his liaison to the communists during the late 1930s and early 1940s.

An anti-imperialist *independentista* throughout his life, Geigel-Polanco might have also been instrumental in providing Muñoz with the support of non-proletarian groups in the left. His ideological quarrel with the governor in the early 1950s turned Geigel-Polanco into a political outcast in the PPD's historical Hades. After his demise, he returned to the University of Puerto Rico to teach until shortly before his death in 1979.⁷⁷ Although a brilliant lawyer, professor, essayist, and ideologue, his contributions have yet to be fully acknowledged and recovered.⁷⁸

In turn, Samuel R. Quiñones, Géigel-Polanco's classmate and nationalist partner in Sager's short-lived anti-imperialist venture, became not only a prominent lawyer, leader of the Constitutional Assembly in 1951, and chief architect of the Commonwealth constitution, but also president of the Puerto Rican Senate for twenty years. The difference between the men's respective political fates takes us back to one of Sager's comments when assessing their characters as young, feisty anti-imperialist supporters: "Personally, Quiñones is not as good and loyal ... as [Géigel] Polanco. [Quiñones] is too much of a *delatante*, and is much more interested in Quiñones [i.e., himself] than in anti-imperialism."⁷⁹

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The stories discussed above showcase the significance of the Russian Revolution in a global context, as they illustrate instances in which the Comintern's radical networks directly or indirectly served as a conveyer belt for Soviet cultural influence. They also enhance our awareness of the revolution's unexpected impact beyond clear-cut demarcations of political theory and practice, as an ideological incubator of original cultural producers who aimed to defy obstinate traditions as well as national idiosyncrasies. The contribution of several of these individuals, particularly Seki Sano and Arcady Boytler, include vestiges of the social and artistic iconoclasm, experimentation, and proletarian subject matter that distinguished early Bolshevik revolutionary culture.⁸⁰ Arcady Boytler's and Ángel del Río's sketchy proposals of the Marxist dialectical fusion of social contradictions as the fundamental impulse for transformation in film and literary analysis also stand out as possible revolutionary heirlooms.

In addition, the discussion highlights a usually overlooked issue in the history of communist fellow travellers: that yesterday's loyal communist could easily be transformed into one of those derided "me-too" communist *poputchiki*. Archival materials, for example, clearly evince

a shift in the Comintern's correspondence, from the more personal communication and "fraternal" farewells reminiscent of the Second International period, to the more official, ideologically defined "with communist greetings" typical of the more regimented communism of the 1930s. As Ángel del Río's case suggests, members of the radical network may have already used such terminology as early as 1927, as an ideological calling card to identify themselves or define their political stance in view of the ongoing internal party debates and purges. On the other hand, Seki Sano's ideological identity probably shifted from that of a bona fide member of the Comintern radical network to that of a *poputchik* as his relationship with Mexican communists – many of them Trotskyists – evolved. While ideological precision or political devotion can be difficult to assess in the case of these communist fellow travellers, in most of these cases, communist internationalism's postulates seemed to have remained a cultural genome to some degree or other in their work and visions.

Although scholars sometimes choose to disregard ideology when examining the scholarly or aesthetic contributions of the pioneers of modernity in Latin America and the Caribbean, this discussion underscores the need for taking these aspects into consideration, particularly in view of archival evidence attesting to a past affiliation with the communist internationalist network headquartered in Moscow. Like the androgynous depictions of angels in Renaissance paintings, the standard-bearers of modernity in the region are usually rendered indistinctly apolitical and universal – heroes to a whole nation, not just to a few. In other cases, the exigencies of underground work in the Comintern grid has until recently made it almost impossible to detect agents' covert and real identities. However, once the person's past experience and relationship to communism emerges as an identifier, elements that seemed coincidental suggest new readings between the lines. As a result, communism as a cultural hologram rather than as a political ideology inevitably permeates the picture and expands the radius of vision. Consequently, the unsuspected contributions of communist internationalism as a revolutionary export commodity and unifying common denominator for worldwide radicalism can finally be deciphered.

As these individuals' biographical sketches corroborate, Russian thought may have had not only "a profound effect" on the course of modern history (as Steven Marks observes in *How Russia Shaped the Modern World*), but also may have actually contributed

fundamental elements for a shared understanding of the meaning of modernity itself.⁸¹ In the case of the Russian Revolution's bequest to Latin America's cultural visions, the revolutionary dreams and artistic experimentation of the earlier euphoric period may have gone up in smoke by the time they had reached the other side of the globe, as the personal trajectories of Seki Sano, Ángel del Río, and Arcady Boytler attest. But an ideological infrastructure outside the confines of Marxism, Bolshevism, or even communist internationalism survived the arduous transatlantic crossing to the Americas as a more viable alternative to old patterns of thought, discourse, and aesthetic expression.

NOTES

Epigraph from a poem by Puerto Rican poet and radical nationalist Juan Antonio Corretjer, “*En la vida todo es ir*”: “*En la vida todo es ir a lo que el tiempo deshace, Sabe el hombre dónde nace y no dónde va a morir.*”

- 1 In the second chapter of his 1923 work *Literatura i revolutsiia*, Leon Trotsky used the term in relation to the artistic community that supported the revolution, posing the question about the extent of their loyalty to ideological foundations.
- 2 Michael David-Fox, “Fellow Travelers Revisited: The ‘Cultured West’ Through Soviet Eyes,” *The Journal of Modern History* 75, no. 2 (June 2003): 300–35. Another work focusing on the cultural and ideological exchange between the Soviets and the West, in which fellow travellers had an outstanding presence, is Steven Marks, *How Russia Shaped the Modern World: From Art to Anti-Semitism, Ballet to Bolshevism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004). See also: Ludmila Stern, *Western Intellectuals and the Soviet Union, 1920–1940: From Red Square to the Left Bank* (London: Routledge, 2006); David Caute, *Fellow-Travellers: Intellectual Friends of Communism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988); José Aricó, ed., *Mariátegui y los orígenes del marxismo latinoamericano* (México, D.F.: Ediciones Pasado y Presente/Siglo XXI Editores, 1978); and Nelson L. Dawson, “From Fellow Traveler to Anticommunist: The Odyssey of J.B. Matthews,” *Register of the Kentucky Historical Society* 84, no. 3 (Summer 1986): 280–306.
- 3 Michael Goebel, *Anti-imperial Metropolis: Interwar Paris and the Seeds of Third World Nationalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015);

Hakim Adi, “Pan-Africanism and Communism: The Comintern, the ‘Negro Question’ and the First International Conference of Negro Workers, Hamburg 1930,” *African and Black Diaspora: An International Journal* 1, no. 2 (2008): 237–54; Paul Buhle, *Tim Hector: A Caribbean Radical’s Story* (Oxford: University Press of Mississippi, 2006); Ricardo Melgar Bao, “Cominternismo intelectual: Redes, representaciones y prácticas en América Central, 1921–1933,” *Revista Complutense de Historia de América* 35 (2009): 135–59; Minkah Makalani, “Internationalizing the Third International: The African Blood Brotherhood, Asian Radicals, and Race, 1919–1922,” *The Journal of African-American History* 96, no. 2 (Spring 2011): 151–78; Winston James, *Holding Aloft the Banner of Ethiopia: Caribbean Radicalism in Early Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Verso, 1998).

- 4 For biographical sketches of more than one thousand members of the Comintern’s Latin American network: Lázar Jeifets and Víctor Jeifets, *América Latina en la Comintern: Diccionario biográfico* (Santiago de Chile: Ediciones Ariadna, 2015).
- 5 Manuel Caballero, *Entre Gómez y Stalin: La sección venezolana de la Internacional Comunista* (Caracas: Universidad Central de Venezuela, Consejo de Desarrollo Científico y Humanístico, 1989); Robert J. Alexander, *The Communist Party of Venezuela* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1969); Robert J. Alexander, *Rómulo Betancourt and the Transformation of Venezuela* (New Jersey: Transaction Books, 1982); Rodolfo Cerdas-Cruz, *The Communist International in Central America, 1920–36* (Oxford: Basingstoke, Macmillan Press/St Anthony’s College, 1993).
- 6 Steven Schwartzberg, “Rómulo Betancourt: From a Communist Anti-Imperialist to a Social Democrat with US Support,” *Journal of Latin American Studies* 29, no. 3 (October 1997): 613–65; Steven Ellner, “The Venezuelan Left in the Era of the Popular Front, 1936–1945,” *Journal of Latin American Studies* 11, no. 1 (1979): 169–84.
- 7 Lázar Jeifets and Víctor Jeifets, “El giro a la izquierda en América Latina y el nacimiento del nuevo bolivarianismo: Las tradiciones de la Komintern y la actualidad,” *cs* 4, Cali (julio–diciembre 2009): 195–212.
- 8 See, for example: Josh Gosciak, *The Shadowed Country: Claude McKay and the Romance of the Victorians* (New Brunswick and London: Rutgers University Press, 2006); Tyrone Tillery, *Claude McKay: A Black Poet’s Struggle for Identity* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1992).
- 9 Gary Edward Holcomb, *Claude McKay, Code Name Sasha: Queer Black Marxism and the Harlem Renaissance* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2007).

- ¹⁰ In her dissertation, Tatiana Tagirova analyzes the Russian roots of McKay's discourse and philosophical perspectives, pointing out how his experience in the Soviet Union and his love for the Russian classics, such as Tolstoy, were as influential in the development of his narrative style as the other experiences of McKay's life as a world traveller. See: Tagirova, *Claude McKay's Liberating Narrative: Russian and Anglophone Caribbean Literary Connections* (PhD diss., University of Puerto Rico, Río Piedras, 2005). See also: Winston James, *A Fierce Hatred of Injustice: Claude McKay's Jamaican Poetry of Rebellion* (New York: Verso, 2001).
- ¹¹ See, for example: Minkah Makalani, "Internationalizing the Third International: The African Blood Brotherhood, Asian Radicals, and Race, 1919–1922," *The Journal of African-American History* 96, no. 2 (Spring 2011): 151–78; Emily Lyogo, "Promoting Soviet Culture in Britain: The History of the Society for Cultural Relations between the Peoples of the British Commonwealth and the USSR, 1924–1945," *The Modern Language Review* 108, no. 2 (April 2013): 571–96; Irina Filatova, "Indoctrination or Scholarship? Education of Africans at the Communist University of the Toilers of the East in the Soviet Union, 1923–1938," *Paedagogica Historica* 35, no. 1 (1999): 41–66.
- ¹² Archival documentation related to two of the individuals included in this essay – Seki Sano and Ángel del Río – has made it possible to establish their past relationship to Comintern activity.
- ¹³ Sandra Pujals, "A Soviet Caribbean: The Comintern, New York's Immigrant Community, and the Forging of Caribbean Visions, 1931–1936," *Russian History* 41, no. 2 (2014): 255–68.
- ¹⁴ Michiko Tanaka, "Seki Sano and Popular Political, and Social Theater in Latin America," *Latin American Theater Review* (Spring 1994): 53–69.
- ¹⁵ On Soviet proletarian theater, see Lynn Mally, *Revolutionary Acts: Amateur Theater and the Soviet State, 1917–1938* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000).
- ¹⁶ Tanaka, "Seki Sano," 54.
- ¹⁷ For a summary and biographical highlights of several left-wing literary figures involved in Marxist activity in Japan at the time, see Donald Keene, "Japanese Literature and Politics in the 1930s," *Journal of Japanese Studies* 2, no. 2 (Summer 1976): 225–48. The most complete work on the Japanese League of Proletarian Theater was written during the Soviet period when Western scholars did not have access to the Comintern archives: Jean Jacques Tschudin, *La ligue de théâtre prolétarien japonais* (Paris: L'Harmatan, 1989).

- 18 Masuru Ito, “The Work of the Scientific Research Laboratory Affiliated to the Meyerhold Theater: An Experiment in Making Performance Scores,” *Theater Studies: Journal of Japanese Society for Theater Research* 61 (2015): 1–20.
- 19 The archival documentation for the event is part of the Comintern digitized archival material for the International Union of Proletarian Theaters available at the Library of Congress (INCOMKA archive). Lynn Mally, “Autonomous Theater and the Origins of Socialist Realism: The 1932 Olympiad of Autonomous Theaters,” *Russian Review* 52, no. 2 (April 1993): 198–212.
- 20 Robert A. Scalopino, *The Japanese Communist Movement, 1920–1967* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: California University Press, 1966), 42–4; Tetsuro Kato, “The Japanese Victims of Stalinist Terror in the USSR,” *Hitotsubashi Journal of Social Studies* 32, no. 1 (July 2000): 1–13.
- 21 Lynn Mally, “Erwin Piscator and Soviet Cultural Policy,” *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 51, no. 2 (2003): 236–53; C.D. Innes and James M. Harding, eds., *Contours of the Theatrical Avant-Garde: Performance and Textuality* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000); Baz Kershaw, *The Radical Performance: Between Brecht and Baudrillard* (London: Taylor and Francis Group, 1999).
- 22 Gerard Probst, *Erwin Piscator and the American Theater* (New York, Bern, and Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1991); John Willett, “Erwin Piscator: New York and the Dramatic Workshop,” *Performing Arts Journal* 2, no. 3 (Winter 1978): 3–16.
- 23 According to one of his biographers, Sano “came to Mexico with a specific mission and support” from New York. Tanaka, “Seki Sano,” 59.
- 24 Mexico’s “neutrality” and its government’s lenient stance on the Nazis until the “state of war” declaration in 1942 remains a somewhat ignored subject of inquiry, in view of the controversial issues involved. Some of the few works that discuss the matter include: Guillermo López-Contreras, “Cuando el mundo le dio la espalda a una democracia. La diplomacia mexicana ante la desaparición de Checoslovaquia, 1938–1940,” (MA thesis, Universidad Michoacana de San Nicolás de Hidalgo, 2011); Héctor Orestes-Aguilar, “El Taller de Gráfica Popular y el exilio alemán en México, 1937–1945” in *El poder de la imagen ante el totalitarismo* (México, D.F.: Museo Memoria y Tolerancia, 2012); Friedrich Katz, *The Secret War in Mexico: Europe, the United States, and the Mexican Revolution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981). The author would like to thank her former student Ángel Villegas Cruz for this bibliographical data on the subject.

- 25 Margarita Tortajada Quiroz, “*La Coronela de Waldeen*: Una danza revolucionaria,” *Casa del tiempo* 1, no. 8 (June 2008): 54–60.
- 26 From a traditional nationalism rooted in antagonism against the United States, the new government focused on a return to the revolutionary ideals as a collective nationalist representation. The new agenda paved the way for Mexico’s support for the Allies, particularly after the US entered the war in 1941. Alberto Dallal, “El nacionalismo prolongado: El movimiento mexicano de danza moderna, 1940–1955,” in *La danza en situación* (México, D.F.: Gernika, 1985), 267–78.
- 27 Philip C. Kolin, “The Mexican Premier of Tennessee Williams’ *A Streetcar Named Desire*,” *Mexican Studies/Estudios Mexicanos* 10, no. 2 (Summer 1994): 315–40; Roni Unger, *Poesía en alta voz in the Theater in Mexico* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1981), 4.
- 28 Philip C. Kolin and Auxiliadora Arana, “An Interview with Wolf Ruvinskis: The First Mexican Stanley Kowalski,” *Latin American Theater Review* 26, no. 2 (1993): 158–65.
- 29 Mexican cinema was the leading cultural export to Latin America between the late 1930s and early 1950s. Mexican screen stars, movies, and music of that era remain popular culture icons throughout the region from generation to generation. Mexico’s Federal District also became Latin America’s movie capital, and a transnational training hub for actors and actresses from all Spanish-speaking countries, Spain included. See David R. Maciel, *Mexico’s Cinema: A Century of Film and Filmmakers* (Wilmington: SR Books, 1999); Carl J. Mora, *Mexican Cinema: Reflections of a Society, 1896–2004* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); Andrea Noble, *Mexican National Cinema* (New York: Taylor and Francis, 2005).
- 30 George Woodyard, “Momentos claves del teatro hispanoamericano del siglo XX,” *Arrabal*, nos. 7–8 (2010): 99–100.
- 31 Santiago García, “Seki Sano en Colombia,” *Tramoya* 15 (1979): 1–5.
- 32 On Seki Sano’s contribution to Mexican and Colombian theater, see: Guillermmina Fuentes Ibarra, *Cuatro propuestas escénicas en la ciudad de México: Teatro Panamericano y Teatro de Me* (México, D.F.: UNAM; DGPFE; INBA, 2007); Carlos José Reyes, “El teatro en Colombia en el siglo XX,” *Revista Credencial Historia* 198 (June 2006); “Eugenio Barba on the Theatrical Family Tree,” *New Theater Quarterly* 19, no. 2 (May 2003), 115–17; Jovita Millán y Michiko Tanaka, *Seki Sano, 1905–1966* (México, D.F.: cnca/INBA-CITRU, 1996). The author is greatly indebted to Seki Sano’s biographer, Dr Michiko Tanaka Nishishima of the Colegio de México, for confirming some of the data on Seki’s work.

- 33 Madeleine Cucuel, "Seki Sano y el teatro moderno en México," in *De la colonia a la postmodernidad: Teoría teatral y crítica sobre teatro latinoamericano*, edited by Peter J. Roster and Mario A. Rojas (México, D.F.: Instituto ITCtl; Editorial Galerna, 1992).
- 34 García, "Seki Sano en Colombia," 5.
- 35 For example, a leading Puerto Rican theater actress by the name of Josie Pérez studied with Seki Sano in Mexico during the late 1940s after working in Hollywood for a short period. Although one of the leading actresses in Puerto Rico's soap opera television productions in the early 1950s, Pérez was unofficially banned from the media because of her participation in an actors' strike advocating the establishment of a union. She went on to form her own company, *Producciones Cisne*, with another outstanding theater figure, Myrna Casas. Some of the information on Pérez's career is based on the author's family oral history. The data regarding Pérez's studies with Seki Sano is confirmed by a theater director and drama professor at the University of Puerto Rico, Dean Zayas, and corroborated by published sources: Kolin, "The Mexican Premier of Tennessee Williams' *A Streetcar Named Desire*," 321.
- 36 A selection of documents in the Comintern archive concerning proletarian theater, and the political and cultural scene in Japan during the early 1930s, includes Sano's name as a reporter for the Piscator's Comintern front organization *Internationaler Arbeiter Theater Bund* in Berlin. See Rossiisskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv sotsial'no-politicheskoi istorii (RGASPI), f. 540, op. 1, d. 10, l. 4, 6, 9, 10. On the Comintern and left theater organizations, including Piscator's, see: Lynn Mally, "Exporting Soviet Culture: The Case of Agitprop Theater," *Slavic Review* 62, no. 2 (Summer 2003): 324–42; Peter Diezel, "Arbeiter-Theater-Bund Deutschlands (ATBD)," in "*Wenn wir zu spielen-scheinen*": *Studien und Dokumente zum Internationalen Revolutionären Theaterbund*, edited by Peter Diezel (Bern: Peter Lang, 1993).
- 37 In 2002, several researchers (including Seki Sano's biographer Michiko Tanaka) and several actors established the *Fundación Seki Sano* in charge of promoting the drama teacher's contribution to Mexican theater and cinema and preserving the archive related to his life and work: Carlos Paul, "Anuncia objetivos la Fundación Seki Sano," *La Jornada*, 1 August 2002, www.jornada.unam.mx/2002/08/01/02an2cul.php.
- 38 Mario Moreno's popularity won him a starring role in the Hollywood classic *Around the World in Eighty Days*, where he played the part of David Niven's sidekick in the journey.

- 39 His early films include: *Akady kontroler spalnykh vagonov* (*Arcady – Sleeping Car Purser*, 1915), *Akady zhenitsa* (*Arcady Gets Married*, 1915), and *Akady sportsman* (*Arcady the Athlete*, 1916).
- 40 Eduardo de la Vega Alfaro, *Arcady Boytler* (Jalisco, México: Universidad de Guadalajara; CIEC, 1992), 20–1.
- 41 According to Boytler's biography, Eduardo de la Vega Alfaro, Boytler, and Eisenstein had already met and worked together in Russia in their youth.
- 42 Horacio Legrás, *Culture and Revolution: Violence, Memory and the Making of Modern Mexico* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2017), 164. Legrás states that only a written description of the content survives. However, Boytler's biographer, Eduardo de la Vega, actually discovered a copy of the original in 2012, among materials donated to an archive. The film lasted ten minutes and included a separate soundtrack. See Janet Aguilar, "Hallan primer cortometraje de Arcady Boytler," *El Universal*, 17 September 2012, www.eluniversal.com.mx/notas/870848.html.
- 43 Carlos Monsiváis, "Cantinflas and Tin Tan: Mexico's Greatest Comedians," in *Mexico's Cinema: A Century of Film and Filmmakers*, edited by Joanne Hershfield and David R. Maciel (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources, 1999), 49–79; Illan Stavans, *The Riddle of Cantinflas: Essays on Hispanic Popular Culture* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1998).
- 44 Noble, *Mexican National Cinema*; Jorge Ayala Blanco, ed., *La aventura del cine mexicano: En la época de oro y después* (México, D.F.: Grijalba, 1997); Gustavo García and Rafael Aviña, eds., *Época de oro del cine mexicano*. (México, D.F.: Clío, 1993).
- 45 Boytler and his wife had a collection of Frida Kahlo's works. Kahlo's iconic self-portrait as a wounded deer (*Venado herido*, 1946) was a gift from the artist to Boytler and his wife, as the dedication in the back of the painting shows.
- 46 Julia Tuñón, "Eisenstein en México: Recuento de una experiencia," *Historias* 55 (2003): 22–40.
- 47 Jeffrey M. Pilcher, *Cantinflas and the Chaos of Mexican Modernity* (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources, 2001).
- 48 Gerardo Piña Rosales, "La universidad norteamericana: Departamentos de español, grandes figuras del hispanismo y asociaciones e instituciones culturales," in *Enciclopedia del español en los Estados Unidos: Anuario del Instituto Cervantes*, edited by Humberto López Morales (Madrid: Instituto Cervantes, 2008), 462; Ángel del Río, *Historia de la Literatura Española* (New York: Holt McDougall, 1963); "Spanish Teacher Headed Department at New York University," *Columbia Daily Spectator* 106, no. 91 (27 March 1962): 127.

- 49 The data concerning del Río's secret life was recovered from letters recently found in the Bertram Wolfe Papers (BDWP) at the Manuscript and Archives Division (MAD) of the New York Public Library (NYPL).
- 50 Ángel del Río, "Quijotismo y cervantismo: El devenir de un símbolo," *Revista de Estudios Hispánicos* 1, no. 3 (July–September 1928): 241–73.
- 51 See "Ángel del Río (1901–1962)," *Revista Iberoamericana de Bibliografía (RIB)* 8, no. 1 (1963): 127–8.
- 52 "Spanish Teacher Headed Department at New York University," *Columbia Daily Spectator*.
- 53 Ibid.
- 54 A 1926 record for a preliminary organizational meeting of the island's first communist group, *Liga Comunista de Puerto Rico*, confirms "Cabrera" as the co-founder of that entity: NYPL, MAD, BDWP, Box 2, "Puerto Rico Miscellany and Fragments": "Acta de la sección preparatoria celebrada en Bayamón el día 9 de mayo de 1926."
- 55 NYPL, MAD, BDWP, Box 1, "Letters to Jaime Nevares Sager, 1926 and undated": Ángel del Río's letter to James Sager, Miami, 13 October 1926, 1.
- 56 Ibid.
- 57 NYPL, MAD, BDWP, Box 1, "Letters from Jaime Nevares Sager, 1926 and undated": James Sager's letter to Bertram D. Wolfe, San Juan, 10 November 1926; NYPL, MAD, BDWP, Box 1, "Letters to Jaime Nevares Sager, 1927 and undated": Salvador de la Plaza's letter to James Sager, México, 15 February 1927; NYPL, MAD, BDWP, Box 1, "Letters to Jaime Nevares Sager, 1926 and undated": Manuel Gómez's letter to James Sager, 21 June 1926. On the early period of the Comintern's relationship with Latin American radicalism, see: V.L. Jeifets and L.C. Jeifets, *Formirovanie i razvitiye*; Daniel Kersfeld, "Tensiones y conflictos en los orígenes del comunismo latinoamericano: Las secciones de la Liga Antiimperialista de las Américas," *Estudios Interdisciplinarios de América Latina y el Caribe* 18, no. 2 (2006–07); Daniela Spenser, "México revolucionario: Laboratorio político de Charles Phillips," in *México, país refugio: La experiencia de los exilios en el siglo XX*, edited by Pablo Yankelevich (México, D.F.: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 2002), 157–66.
- 58 NYPL, MAD, BDWP, Box 1, "Letters to Jaime Nevares Sager, 1926 and undated": Ángel del Río's letter to James Sager, Miami, 13 October 1926, 1–2.
- 59 NYPL, MAD, BDWP, Box 1, "Letters to Jaime Nevares Sager, 1926 and undated": Ángel del Río's letter to James Sager, Miami, 17 March 1927.
- 60 NYPL, MAD, BDWP, Box 1, "Letters to Jaime Nevares Sager, 1926 and undated": Carta de Ángel del Río a James Sager, Miami, 17 de marzo de

1927. By the second half of the 1920s, the former “fraternal greetings” usually found in official correspondence among the old generation of communist leaders had been substituted for the much more politically distinctive “with communist greetings” that del Río chose. In this case, del Río’s choice was most likely specifically intended to reiterate his ideological commitment, in response to Sager’s attack against a lack of conviction in the anti-imperialist enterprise.

- 61 Sandra Pujals, “Becoming Jaime Nevares: Imagination and Identity Reinvention in the Communist International’s Latin American Network, 1919–1943,” in *The Global Impacts of Russia’s 1917 Revolutions*, book 2, *The Wider Arc of Revolution*, part 1, edited by Choi Chatterjee, Steven G. Marks, Mary Neuberger, and Steven Sabol (Bloomington: Slavica, forthcoming).
- 62 That same year, Federico de Onís and del Río organized Federico García Lorca’s celebrated visit to New York. Ángel del Río was a personal friend of the famous radical poet from his university days in Madrid. The event included a number of posh social and cultural gatherings with the city’s intellectual and social elite, which probably also contributed to del Río’s professional success. On the visit, see Andrew A. Anderson, ed., *América en un poeta. Los viajes de Federico García Lorca al Nuevo Mundo y la repercusión de su obra en la literatura americana* (Sevilla: Universidad Internacional de Andalucía, 1999).
- 63 Ángel del Río, “Quijotismo y cervantismo: El devenir de un símbolo,” *Revista de Estudios Hispánicos de Puerto Rico* 1, no. 3 (1928): 241–67. On its significance, see Juan Bravo Castillo, *Grandes hitos de la historia de la novela euroamericana*, vol. 1 (Madrid: Cátedra, 2003), 127–92.
- 64 At the end of del Río’s essay, a footnote was added explaining that after del Río’s work was already written, the *Revista de Occidente* in Spain had published an article by Ángel Sánchez Rivero, “*Las ventas del Quijote*,” that was “of the uttermost importance and interest for the modern critical assessment of Cervantes’s work.” See Ángel del Río, “Quijotismo y cervantismo,” 267.
- 65 Sandra Pujals, “El *poputchik* español: Un episodio secreto en la vida de Ángel del Río, célebre catedrático cervantista, 1926–1927,” *Cuadernos de Historia Contemporánea* 38 (2016): 57–75.
- 66 Ángel del Río, “Quijotismo y cervantismo,” 247.
- 67 Ibid., 266.
- 68 Ibid., 267.
- 69 Ibid., 242.
- 70 Sandra Pujals, “¡Embarcados!” *Históricas de la Universidad de Puerto Rico* 22 (2013–14): 105–39.

- 71 Luis Ángel Ferrao, Pedro Albizu Campos y el nacionalismo puerorriqueño (Río Piedras: Editorial Cultural, 1990); Amilcar Tirado Avilés, “La forja de un líder: Pedro Albizu Campos, 1924–1930,” in *La nación puertorriqueña: Ensayos en torno a Pedro Albizu Campos*, edited by Juan Manuel Carrión, Teresa C. García Ruiz, and Carlos Rodríguez Fraticelli (Río Piedras: Editorial de la Universidad de Puerto Rico, 1997), 71–4.
- 72 Ibid., 71–2.
- 73 Pujals, “¡Embarcados!,” 124–9. Regarding the international context that Albizu supposedly contributed to the *El Nacionalista de Ponce*, see: Tirado-Avilés, “La forja de un líder,” 71–5. See also Pujals, “¡Embarcados!,” on the new data concerning Sager’s communication with the Puerto Rican Nationalist Party.
- 74 Colorado apparently did not continue his friendship with Sager after his departure from the island sometime around late 1926 or early 1927. See Pujals, “¡Embarcados!,” 111–14.
- 75 Centro de Investigaciones Históricas, Universidad de Puerto Rico, Río Piedras, *Colección César Andreu Iglesias, Subfondo: Papeles de César Andreu Iglesias, Sección del documento: Actividades Personales, Serie: Periódicos, Caja 3: Periódicos*.
- 76 After receiving his PhD in philosophy and letters from the University of Madrid, Antonio Colorado Capella returned to Puerto Rico, where he held important positions as professor and dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences at the University of Puerto Rico. He wrote innumerable articles and essays, and received an important award for journalism from the Puerto Rican Institute of Literature. He is sometimes confused with his son, Antonio J. Colorado, who was resident commissioner in Washington, DC for the Puerto Rican government during the late 1960s. For a summary of Colorado’s life and work, see “Historia del PPD,” *Partido Popular Democrático*, <https://www.ppdpr.net/historia-del-ppd>; *Enciclopedia de Puerto Rico*, <https://enciclopediapr.org/encyclopedia/colorado-antonio>; and “Conmemoran el 75 aniversario del emblema del PPD en la ‘Peña de la Pava’,” <https://www.metro.pr/pr/noticias/2013/08/11/conmemoran-el-75-aniversario-del-emblema-del-ppd.html>
- 77 The *New York Times* carried the news of his death: “Vicente Geigel Polanco, 76, Dies; Puerto Rican Writer and Lawyer,” *New York Times*, 2 May 1979, 25.
- 78 Nestor R. Duprey, *Independentista Popular: Las causas de Vicente Géigel Polanco* (San Juan: Crónicas, 2005); José Anazagasty Rodríguez, “El problema universitario de Vicente Géigel-Polanco,” *80 grados*, 9 March 2012, <http://www.80grados.net/el-problema-universitario-de-vicente-geigel-polanco>.

- 79 NYPL, MAD, BDWP, Box 1, "Letters from Jaime Nevares Sager, 1927 and undated": James Sager's letter to Manuel Gómez, 15 February 1927.
- 80 Richard Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams: Utopian Vision and Experimental Life in the Russian Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).
- 81 Marks, *How Russia Shaped the Modern World*, 6.

The Transnational Experience of Some Canadian Communists

Andrée Lévesque

When the Comintern spoke of internationalism in the 1920s and 30s, it usually meant what today would be called transnationalism. As Brigitte Studer and Sabine Dullin put it: “Communism is transnational but one needed the perspective of transnational history to think of it as such.”¹ Transnationalism takes place between people through and over borders; communism, promoting a political and an economic system as well as a culture that transcended national boundaries, was indeed a transnational phenomenon. This chapter looks at this experience, not from the point of view of the Comintern and its various structures, but rather from the standpoint of the Canadian militants, travellers, and students who left us published and unpublished recollections of their life in the communist movement in the interwar period.² My focus is on the individuals who were initiated into the large communist family, sharing things in common with its members around the world.

Memoirs and other autobiographical writings are by definition subjective and transmit representations that may reflect what is expected of their authors, or what they can recollect sometimes many years later, or what they think is worth remembering. Mindful of all the pitfalls of personal accounts, there is still value in unearthing some self-representations of the transnational communist experience, to understand better the common socialization of individuals active in the communist movement at the time. Readers of autobiographical texts can use these as exemplars, as models to be followed, as illustrations of situations accounted for through other sources such as the archives of the Comintern or of the Communist Party of Canada

(CPC), or as testimonies essential to the construction of the collective memory of communism.

When someone joined the Communist Party, he or she joined an organization, the Third International, of which the CPC was one of the many national components. By entering the party, men and women became members not just of a party but of a movement that demanded total commitment; they joined a community that considered itself above the confines of nations, one that shared a *habitus*, with common reference points, symbols, commemorations, and even ways of speaking. In the words of Stanley Bréhaut Ryerson, belonging to the party entailed “a change of mind,” one that was even more pronounced for middle-class members. Here Ryerson refers to Norman Bethune, but the same comment can also be applied to him: for a professional or an academic to join the left in the Montreal of the mid-thirties was to make a drastic break with past and present associates, relationships, and structures of authority.³ For the workers, it was to adopt a collective class identity that was not limited to their factories or to their country.

The history of communism in Canada can never be bound by national history. It cannot be studied without reference to communism in other countries, first and foremost in the USSR, the workers’ homeland, but also in countries such as Germany, Spain, France, and Italy. Communists also belonged to any of a number of associations created by the Communist International that functioned on a transnational basis. To name but a few: the Red International of Labour Unions (Profintern), which brought together the communist unions; the League against Imperialism that supported colonial countries as well as the blacks of America; and the International Red Aid (MOPR), active in the defense of “class-war” prisoners, initially on a non-partisan basis, but later specifically of those arrested during strikes organized by communists.⁴ The League against War and Fascism, a mass organization, enlisted large numbers of people on the left who protested together – often on the same days as people in Berlin and Paris – against the rise of fascism. The Young Pioneers and the Young Communist Leagues functioned wherever there was a communist party. These organizations shared the same codes, celebrated the same anniversaries (from Lenin’s death to International Women’s Day and many others), and supported each other’s struggles.⁵ Their members developed both the feeling and reality of being part of a community that operated across borders, regardless of language or nationality.

Key moments of the communist transnational experience illustrate this sense of belonging in a universal movement: the trips to the Soviet Union; the political education provided first at home, in the CPC, then in Moscow at the Lenin International School; and that quintessential transnational phenomenon, the Spanish Civil War.

COMMUNIST EDUCATION

Since one was seldom born a communist, and since the party attracted mainly young people, often under the age of twenty, political education, which was similar throughout the member-groups of the Comintern, held a crucial place in the process of becoming a communist. The international/transnational dimension of the communist movement was thus an integral part of a communist education. Communist socialization happened at various stages in one's life. Children between ten and fifteen years old were sent to the Young Pioneers by their parents or by a relative, but most militants of the interwar period were too old to have worn the little red scarf. Dave Kashtan recalls in his memoirs that his older brother Bill incited him to join the Little Pioneers Club in Montreal in order to play the mandolin in the club's orchestra.⁶ David Weiss (who changed his name to David White), in unpublished memoirs written for his grandchildren, tells how his older sister took him to a meeting of the Little Pioneers.⁷ These reunions gave the children a perspective on the world that was a far cry from the Canadian nationalism taught in public schools, where the day started with a prayer, and, in anglophone institutions, a salute to the Union Jack and the singing of "God Save the King." Kashtan, then thirteen years old, "for the first time experienced discussion and debate of current events."⁸ For White, reading *The Communist Manifesto* so young was a "revelation"; he recalls how, as the son of poor immigrants from Ukraine, he could "relate to the dialectical materialist class analysis." Sixty years later, he still remembered the lecturers who "spoke of a world-wide struggle to throw off the shackles of oppression," and usher in a "universal Socialist system ... [when a] new 'Soviet man' would emerge."⁹

For young people over the age of fourteen, the Young Communist League (YCL) recruited across Canada. The YCL, often one's first contact with the communist movement, provided a cultural environment marked by a commitment to social and economic change through collective action under the guidance of a revolutionary

political party. David White felt like part of a world-wide movement: “I read reports of progress of the Communist movement in Italy, Germany, France, and other countries. The International Press Correspondence (Inprecor) was read from start to end ... Continuing our readings and studies we felt we were privy to a formula soon to encompass the whole world.”¹⁰ Summer camps – such as the one in Sylvan Lake, Alberta, in the late 1920s, which was attended by Jeanne Corbin and directed by Becky Buhay, or the one in northern Quebec, which was led by Stanley Bréhaut Ryerson in the 1930s and 40s – completed or reinforced the young militants’ education.¹¹ Marxist study groups also provided opportunities to contemplate and discuss the practical applications of the standard texts of Bukharin, Lenin, Stalin, and others. For those who left school at eleven or twelve – and there were many such among the unskilled workers the party aimed to recruit – this was often their first experience of intellectual debates, opening their minds to the commonality of the working-class experience and its universal exploitation by capitalism. But even a university graduate like Norman Bethune was not exempt from such discussion groups; his mentor Stanley Ryerson, the party’s education director and the assistant director of *Clarté*, admitted to being impressed by the doctor’s “quick grasp of the dialectics.”¹² Those group discussions centred on the class struggle at home, and on “the theme of international solidarity against fascism.”¹³ Yet “section 13,” to which Ryerson and Bethune belonged, was unusual, for during the Depression as many as 60 per cent of communists were unemployed, many of them with little formal education.¹⁴ Party leaders often complained of the low level of ideological consciousness of the rank-and-file when the party lacked educational materials and the workers neglected to read the party press.¹⁵

The next step would be full membership in the Communist Party. The educated militant was thereafter dedicated to the party that hopefully knew how to make the best use of his or her qualities as organizer, writer, or teacher. Communists were always on the move: their autobiographies reveal the number of jobs they held before and after joining the party. This is especially true of unskilled working-class men, who moved from lumberjack to longshoreman, then to construction and factory work, often on both sides of the Canada-US border, sometimes eventually learning a trade as an electrician or a mechanic. During the Depression, Évariste Dubé, Jack Scott, Willie Fortin, and many others came to the party through unemployed workers associations.¹⁶ After

moving from one end of Canada to the other in search of work, once in the party they were sent to organize where they were most needed: Peter Hunter was “travelling around for the anti-fascist cause” throughout Ontario; Stewart Smith set up branches of the YCL in various Ontario cities; Jack Scott, after joining the party at twenty-four and attending the party school in Toronto for eight weeks, was sent to Kitchener and London, Ontario, as a Workers’ Unity League organizer; Jeanne Corbin was transferred from Toronto to Montreal to Timmins; David White to Windsor.¹⁷ Only White wrote about the inconveniences this moving around caused his family.

TRIPS TO THE SOVIET UNION

The crossing of borders, the experience of seeing the world beyond nations, could be felt physically, geographically, by leaving one’s country and encountering like-minded persons with a shared outlook and a common purpose. In concrete terms, militants were dispatched around their country, Comintern cadres worked in different capitals, and members of the Central Committees or delegates of the YCL attended various European meetings. Stewart Smith, Stanley Ryerson, and other Canadian *apparatchiks* crossed the Atlantic many times to attend such congresses. In 1930, eighteen-year-old Dave Kashtan enthusiastically left Montreal for a six-month stay at the Young Communist camp in Pushkino near Moscow. There, together with students from different countries with whom he established enduring friendships, he studied “political economy, the international working-class movement, Marxist philosophy. Then history of the Russian revolution, and youth and militarism.”¹⁸

Rank-and-file communists as well as fellow-travellers everywhere were encouraged to visit the USSR, especially before 1936. The Friends of the Soviet Union organized many of these trips, one of the first being an exclusively women’s tour in 1930 composed of more than thirty women, not all of whom were party members.¹⁹ Even though the travellers gave a number of public lectures and wrote reports in the party press about their trek, very few left behind personal impressions of the sites they had visited and the people they had met.²⁰ One who did was Beatrice Ferneyhough. She was so enthusiastic when she came back that she wrote a script for a ballet (which was never choreographed).²¹ Amongst others who visited the Soviet Union, Lea Roback spent three months in the Soviet Union in 1934, and Eugenia

(Jim) Watts attended the Moscow Theatre Festival in 1935 and wrote about it in the *Clarion*.²² All stressed the feelings of solidarity that they experienced during their tours.

THE INTERNATIONAL LENIN SCHOOL

The party's educational structures, such as summer schools and Marxist discussion forums, ensured that members of the Young Communist League, as well as party members, acquired a new mentality whereby the collective prevailed over the individual. It was in Moscow, however, that this education was completed for those fortunate enough to be chosen to attend the Comintern's International Lenin School (ILS) for eighteen to twenty-four months. The avowed aim of the school was to train party cadres from different countries in a common Marxist-Leninist analysis, and to create "a militant totally dedicated to the proletarian cause," a true Bolshevik.²³ The ILS opened in September 1926. It was but one of a number of educational institutions set up by the Comintern, such as the Communist University of the Toilers of the East (KUTV), specifically for students from the eastern republics and Asia; the Sun Yat-sen University (UTK) for Chinese students; and the Communist University of National Minorities of the West (KUMNZ). Between 1926 and 1938, the ILS was the transnational experience that transformed young communists from many countries into "universal" – that is, bolshevized – communists.²⁴ Founded primarily to train communist cadres, part of the school's mandate was to bring the students into contact with communist activities in colonial countries. Canadian students who left behind their memoirs seldom refer to students in the other international schools, with whom they seem to have had little contact.²⁵ Friendships could develop between the different language sections, as happened in the case of Stewart Smith and his German roommate. In general, Canadians shared accommodations with anglophones from around the world, with whom some of them developed long-lasting bonds.²⁶ As for French Canadians, they roomed with English-speaking students, since the Comintern had long denied the establishment of a French-speaking section in the CPC. They were expected to study in their second language while also taking Russian courses.

National Secretary of the YCL Stewart Smith, at eighteen, was chosen to attend the first class when the ILS opened in 1926. He was

one of seventy students, from twenty-three countries, awarded a scholarship for eighteen months.²⁷ With the small group of North American students, he joined Sector D of the school, composed of students from the British Commonwealth and the United States. Like all foreign students, they would become members of the Bolshevik Party (VKP(b)) for the duration of their stay. The students were pre-selected in their home countries, based on their proletarian origins, their political commitment, and their potential as cadres. Very few farmers, academics, or white-collar workers ever went to the ILS.²⁸ The candidates were then recommended to the school, which decided whether to accept or refuse them. Writing to the Anglo-American Bureau of the Comintern in 1928, Party Secretary Jack MacDonald considered Leslie Morris "fairly well grounded theoretically, but may not settle down to study as he should." On the other hand, Louis Haner, a miner from Alberta, "does not have much theoretical formation, and this is considered a handicap, but his experience in the mine may be important."²⁹ The party was to be informed of their progress at the school: "We beg of the School Management to have no hesitation in reporting to the Canadian Party on the progress and conduct of these two students."³⁰ The Anglo-American Bureau asked that a special effort be made to recruit French Canadians, as representatives of the most exploited sector of the Canadian working class, but the level of political consciousness among many of them discouraged the recruiters.³¹ A handful of francophones did make it to Moscow, yet while they made up one-third of the population of Canada, they never reached one-third of the students, nor that proportion of the party membership.

For Canadians who went to Moscow, the trip to get there is revealing of the ties that united them with communists in all the countries they travelled through. For instance, after his boat arrived in London, young Stewart Smith was whisked away to lecture to the Welsh miners, then went on to Berlin and was taken to meetings where he was asked to speak on the British general strike. He raised money for the rest of the trip to Moscow by writing a few articles for *Die Rote Fahne*.³²

Students who had the honour of being admitted to the Lenin School realized that it was an important step towards the upper echelons of the party. As historians of communism Claude Pennetier and Bernard Pudal have argued, it was not economic capital nor educational capital (in Pierre Bourdieu's sense) that ensured acceptance and promotion

in the party apparatus, but political capital, which was accumulated through a proletarian class origin, through militant action from the base, and through the Lenin School.³³ This political capital was all the more important for French Canadians – few of whom, in our sample, had attended primary school for more than a few years, and all of whom (except Paul Delisle) came from poor working-class backgrounds. For instance, Willie Fortin, a Franco-American living in Montreal, had three years of schooling in Catholic francophone institutions in Rhode Island and had to take special courses in English afterward.³⁴ This was poor preparation for the demanding curriculum of the Lenin School.

Once settled in Moscow, the students embarked on a full schedule of classes ten hours a day before 1931, then eight and later seven hours, with eight hours of manual work a week.³⁵ For those who left school at an early age, the programme of Marxist-Leninist literature, political economy, and history, plus strategy and tactics, must have been grueling, while sport and cultural activities provided compulsory recreation. Practical work in factories or collective farms occupied the school holidays. On top of the regular classes, the students were expected to show up at lectures by leaders of national parties: Maurice Thorez, Palmiro Togliatti, Earl Browder, Georgy Dimitrov, to name but a few.³⁶

Stewart Smith, one of the few Canadian communists who wrote about his stay in Moscow, remembered discussions about the dictatorship of the proletariat, the impending socialist revolution, the national question in Canada, and the national self-determination of French Canada. Smith's views at times clashed with the communist orthodoxy. He writes of how a barroom conversation in which he had expressed some doubts about the usefulness of expressions like "proletarian revolution" and "the dictatorship of the proletariat" was reported to his class, and how he was made to retract his skepticism regarding the use of the word "dictatorship": "I was defeated on all sides and had to smudge the sharp line of confrontation."³⁷ After another argument over the necessity of a "revolutionary proletarian party," he became "the black sheep of the Lenin School."³⁸ Yet there was no expulsion, and the school, acting as a *creuset*, a melting-pot of sorts, was there to point out errors in interpreting Marxist-Leninism, expecting students to conform to the official explanation. The Young Communists were considered perfectible.

Much has been written about the creation of the “new man,” *homo sovieticus*, and the essential part played by the Lenin School in the emergence of this “new man,” who could be moulded without reference to national lines as part of a universal working class.³⁹ Attendance at the Lenin School instilled in the students not only the correct interpretation of the canon but also the various expressions of a new culture, where the individual all but disappeared behind the interests of the collective, where sacrifice was expected in the name of revolutionary socialism. This new culture included some elements quite foreign to the young North Americans. Upon their arrival, the attribution of a “party name” created a kind of complicity among them: Peter Hunter became Jack Roberts; Stewart Smith, George Pierce; Leslie Morris, John Porter; Sam Carr, Jack Evans; Ivan Vyviursky, John Weir.⁴⁰

This complicity was reinforced by the clandestine atmosphere that surrounded enrollment at the school, and by the acquisition of social norms and practices that contributed to the grand objective of creating a communist man or woman. One of the formative experiences at the Lenin School was the writing of an autobiography (the *avto-biografia*) and the completion of a questionnaire (the *anketa*); examples of both survive in the archives of the Comintern. These were required by the Cadre Commission of the Comintern for all their employees, for cadres in different countries when they acceded to a position in the *apparat* of their national party, and also for students of the ILS. The autobiographies followed a standard form, answering a questionnaire that was the same whether one was from Toronto, Paris, or Vienna.⁴¹ They consisted of two to five pages at the most. The first paragraph dealt with family background, the parents’ social class. For instance, Peter Hunter tells us that his parents were working class, and that his father started working in the coal mines of Scotland at an early age.⁴² Évariste Dubé’s parents lived at a subsistence level from fishing, lumbering, and a bit of farming.⁴³ This was followed by the authors’ education, and their work experiences from their first job on. They mentioned their first contacts with the communist party and who influenced them. They also indicated the politics of other members of their family, especially if such kin also had communist sympathies and read the party press.⁴⁴ Sometimes, if the cadres were promoted in the party hierarchy, for instance to the Central Committee, they would be required to write another

biography. Peter Hunter wrote one in 1935, when he was at the Lenin School, and another in 1940.

The comrades were then asked about their military service (Paul Delisle admitted to having served in Siberia with the Canadian Expeditionary Force in 1919, “in a sense of adventure”), their occupations, their encounters with the police and their arrests, their readings, their languages spoken, their militant activities, the demonstrations they had attended, their party work (paid and unpaid), the organizations and comrades with whom they worked, and their legal and illegal activities. (Again, Delisle admitted that “as for illegal work, it was very limited.”)⁴⁵ Willie Fortin gave his exact earnings from the party: \$4 for his contribution to *Clarté*, the French weekly, and \$4 for his organization work.⁴⁶ Évariste Dubé received \$3 a week as a party organizer in 1937, and when he lost his relief payments the party gave him \$14 a week, the only source of income for the father of three children.⁴⁷ For most of the Canadians, this must have been the first time they bared their souls so openly, exposing not only their own failings, but, in Delisle’s case, acknowledging his mother’s mental illness and his father’s suicide.⁴⁸

It went without saying that each *avtobiografia* was based on a strict notion of the objective truth, and on the last page the authors provided the names of references who could check their statements. In the case of Fortin, Fred Rose, Évariste Dubé, and Stanley Ryerson were asked to assess his facts, whereas Peter Hunter wrote that the National Bureau of the Young Communist League could corroborate his account, and Dubé gave the names of Cléophas Paquette and Léo Lebrun to vouch for him.⁴⁹

The autobiographies were submitted to a *kharaktistika* or evaluation. For the Canadians, these consisted of only a few lines. Willie Fortin was deemed a “loyal and hard working comrade. Disciplined, lacks initiative and mass contact. Has too many jobs to do, and therefore cannot do justice to any of them. Should follow up his education by regular reading and self-study. Should be given work that would give closer contact with the people and be encouraged to develop political initiative.”⁵⁰ Peter Hunter’s evaluation after his second autobiography in 1940 described him as a “loyal and devoted comrade. Insufficient contact with mass work among the youth; capable worker, but has not yet developed sufficient political initiative; disciplined comrade; good grasp of the Party line; does not

organize his own work well and does not fight with sufficient energy for the carrying through of the Party tasks in the youth field.”⁵¹

As for Dubé, he was considered a “hard working comrade. Firm and devoted. Has the greatest respect of other comrades for his firmness and his contribution to the formation of the Party. Good political comprehension, but suffers from a certain timidity which hinders him in his work. Tendency to be tolerant; must widen his contact with the masses. Needs to better his knowledge of French which hinders him in his development.”⁵² This last comment betrays the bureaucrats’ ignorance of the situation of French Canadians in Canada, since Dubé’s mother tongue was French. Given his level of education and his Gaspé accent, Europeans may have underestimated his knowledge of the language.

The act of writing these autobiographies and their evaluation not only provided the Comintern with personal information, but also constituted a rite of passage, another step that confirmed their authors’ shared fraternity in the communist community. Among the practices current in the communist movement, especially after 1933, was what has been called “working on the self,” improving oneself through criticism and self-criticism. The students, like other cadres, were expected to display their own shortcomings as well as those of their peers for the purpose of improving each other. This went as far as producing self-reports on one’s activities, character, and deviations. To grasp the value of this exercise one has to understand the collective responsibility for the worthiness of the individuals, or, as Brigitte Studer put it: “For the group it was necessary to adopt a very critical attitude, since it was held collectively responsible for the success or failure of its members.”⁵³ Researchers have yet to track down self-reports from Canadian students, but a few autobiographies reveal instances of self-criticism. Hunter wrote that after having been accused of Trotskyism, “Comrade Stewart was made the centre of a breast-beating session of criticism and self-criticism.”⁵⁴ Although few of the Canadians reflected on this process, they did mention their shortcomings in their *avtobiografia*. Montrealer Paul Delisle wrote: “a second demonstration [of unemployed] due partly to my failure to orientate myself [it] was a failure. Participated in the Verdun Un. [Unemployed] Movement, but due to my inexperience was unable to do my share in consolidating the gains.” He also admitted that despite all his reading of history, biographies, social problems, he had read little

revolutionary literature prior to the Lenin School.⁵⁵ We know from other sources – European communists were not only more numerous but also more prolific in writing about their communist experience – that personal introspection, even regarding matters generally held to be private, was an important pedagogical tool at the school. The Canadian authors do not mention this and do not dwell on the process of criticism and self-criticism as much as one might expect, although this kind of transparency and self-confession must have been a new experience. In their Canadian schools, these young men and women were not used to assessing their own work and admitting their mistakes publicly in order to learn from their “misunderstandings.”

The graduate from the Lenin School, having internalized the values of international communism, achieved the status of “universal militant,” a Bolshevik at home in any party apparatus in the world: “reliable, unsentimental, uncompromising.”⁵⁶ He or she was qualified to become a middle-level cadre at home. Upon his return, Peter Hunter was elected Toronto secretary of the YCL; Emery Samuel became a *permanent* (paid organizer) in Montreal; a few, like Stewart Smith, Paul Delisle, and Leslie Morris, made it to the Central Committee.

Returning students, just like travellers sponsored by the party, were expected to lecture and write about the Soviet Union and draw comparisons with their home countries. The party press published a number of these testimonies, and labour halls hosted numerous lectures on the progress of the Soviet regime. In one enthusiastic column, Berthe Caron, just back from the Lenin School, contrasted the lot of Quebec rural mothers to those in the Soviet Union. There, women and men, in the fields or in the factories, worked no more than a seven-hour day. Well-aware of Quebec women’s high birth-rate, Caron mentioned the maternity leaves, the creches and nurseries in every village.⁵⁷ If Caron addressed herself to mothers in her women’s page, Emery Samuel, after his return from a stay in the Soviet Union, reported on a woman tramway conductor who, working only six hours a day, found time to study medicine.⁵⁸ Writing about social services provided a chance to put forth a utopian model envied by Canadians, especially during the economic depression.

THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR

The participation in the Spanish Civil War of communists from over thirty-five countries, between September 1936 and the return of the

International Brigades in October 1938, stands out as the foremost example of transnational/international solidarity. For a few Canadians, it was the logical complement to their education at the Lenin School: some students went directly from Moscow to fight in Spain.⁵⁹ Yet, the majority of volunteers left from Canada, and of the 1,200 who served in the International Brigades – the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion or “Mac-Paps” figured prominently for Canadians – most had little political education. Too few of them wrote about their experiences. Ronald Liversedge is one exception, while Ted Allan published a fictionalized account of his service in the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion.⁶⁰ William Kashtan and Roy Davis spent ten days in Spain on their way back from the Geneva Youth Congress of 1936, and upon their return home they gave public lectures on the Spanish situation, and published a pamphlet, *War in Spain: An Eye-Witness Account*.⁶¹ A few others, like Lionel Edwards and William Kardash, have left us interviews and articles.⁶² To these volunteers, one should add the humanitarian workers, but there were also about a dozen nurses and ambulance drivers, as well as a few correspondents. “Jim” Watts, who had joined first the YCL and then the party in 1934, applied to join the International Brigades. She arrived in Madrid at the end of 1936 as correspondent for the *Daily Clarion* and acted as a driver for Norman Bethune’s Mobile Blood Transfusion Unit. In October 1937, she was probably the only woman to have joined the International Brigades.⁶³ After returning to Canada, she went on working for the Committee to Aid Spanish Refugees. Ted Allan also went as correspondent for the *Clarion*, and Henning Sorensen for *The New Commonwealth*.

Norman Bethune stands out as the best-known example of trans-border involvement, first in Spain, then in China. He joined the CPC after a trip to the Soviet Union in 1935, and the party’s international/transnational scope seems to have appealed to him more than trade union activities and proletarian celebrations. As Stanley Bréhaut Ryerson put it, he was “the living example of internationalism, as [were] all his companions in the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion.”⁶⁴ In Bethune’s words in January 1937: “Madrid’s the centre of gravity of the world and I wouldn’t be anywhere else.”⁶⁵

Communists were well aware of the international dimension of the conflict in Spain, where Germany and Italy were actively supporting Franco, and *brigadists* from around the world came in support of the Republicans. Bill Kardash was only one of many who went to fight

“for the cause of progressive mankind.”⁶⁶ Throughout their stay in Spain, the volunteers constantly rubbed shoulders with comrades from a variety of countries. Not all Canadians served in the Fifteenth Brigade’s Mac-Paps. For a while, Liversedge was in the Dimitrov Brigade, the Eighteenth, that comprised men from fourteen countries.⁶⁷ In Valencia, in May 1937, Kardash’s comrades in the Tanks Corps were Austrian, German, and Serb.⁶⁸ All the communists recognized the familiar songs in Russian, German, Italian, and English, and the well-known vernacular already in usage in their country: there were political commissars, cadre services, agitprop, discipline, and the ongoing denunciations of Trotskyists. Some may have been adventurers, and some unemployed may have seen this as an opportunity to do something with their lives, but the vast majority was moved by a political ideal for a better world, in collective solidarity against the march of fascism. For this, they had brought the struggle to another country of which they knew little but where they found, in the brigades, a familiar political culture.

CONCLUSION

The Young Pioneers singing *The Internationale* at a party fundraiser, the YCLers protesting the executions of Sacco and Vanzetti, the cadres analyzing Karl Marx at the ILS, the volunteers fighting against fascism in Spain: all made similar sacrifices of time and money, and contended with threats of arrests and even deportation, in the name of a common ideal and a transnational world-view. Geographically, they came into contact with people from many countries, who spoke different languages, but who understood each other politically and culturally. The Soviet “new man” and “new woman” were to exist above national divides. This experience would never be forgotten. Even the many who left the party after 1956, 1968, or later retained largely positive memories of having belonged to a worldwide movement. We can only deplore the fact that so few left behind their memoirs. But from the writings of those who did put their reminiscences to paper, we can see how they were never confined to one place; they could feel at ease with other comrades when the party sent them from one end of the country to another, or across borders in North America and Europe.

Gérard Fortin, bush-worker, then a member of the merchant marine, referred to the party as a family: “I had been adopted into

a totally different kind of family, and for the next ten years of my life all my energies, emotions, enthusiasms, desires and hopes, everything that kept me alive and kicking and made life worth living, were wrapped up in my brothers and sisters of the Party.”⁶⁹ Trade unionist David White, who left the party after the war to become a successful real estate agent, wrote at the end of his autobiography: “The years in the Communist and Labor movement were the most interesting and satisfying of my life. It made me a better person, more knowledgeable, more aware, more sensitive to the needs of people.”⁷⁰ Lea Roback, life-long militant, would say many years after leaving the party: “I owe a great deal to the Communist Party because it gave me the opportunity to grow and to learn.”⁷¹ Jeanne Corbin, who worked for the party in Toronto, Montreal, Rouyn, and Timmins, wrote a month before dying of tuberculosis at the age of thirty-seven: “I feel I had a wonderful friend in the labor movement and seeing I have to exit early, I feel very glad that I joined when I was very young. One thing is heartening, the whole world is on the march and thousands of new hands are arriving to carry on the work.”⁷² And Peter Hunter of the YCL, who recalled the movement’s songs (*Bandiera rossa*, *Das Einheitsfrontlied*, *Die Moorsoldaten*), remembered that “internationalism was a living thing ... We were idealists, humanists, and true internationalists. We supported the struggles of comrades everywhere.”⁷³

NOTES

- ¹ Brigitte Studer and Sabine Dullin, “L’équation retrouvée de l’internationalisme (premier XXe siècle),” *Monde(s), Communisme transnational*, no. 10 (2016): 9.
- ² This research is based on the autobiographical writings of Paul Delisle, Évariste Dubé, Beatrice Ferneyhough, Gérard Fortin, Willie Fortin, Peter Hunter, William Kardash, Dave Kashtan, Ronald Liversedge, Dorothy Livesay, Stanley Bréhaut Ryerson, Jack Scott, Stewart Smith, Bill Walsh, and David White.
- ³ Stanley Bréhaut Ryerson, “Comrade Beth,” in *Bethune: The Montreal Years*, edited by Wendell McLeod, Libbie Park, Stanley Ryerson (Toronto: James Lorimer, 1968), 145.
- ⁴ MOPR stands for the *Mozhdurodnaya Organizatsiya Pomoshchi Revolyutsii*. There was a long list of communists who, like Jeanne Corbin,

had their attorney and court fees paid by the Canadian arm of Red Aid, the Canadian Labour Defense League.

- 5 Andrée Lévesque, “Célébrations et manifestations des camarades. La culture internationale et l’identitaire communiste au Canada pendant l’entre-deux-guerres,” *Labour/Le Travail* 49 (Printemps 2002): 83–92.
- 6 Dave Kashtan, “Living in One’s Own Time: A Memoir from the Left,” *Labour/Le Travail* 56 (Fall 2005): 212.
- 7 David White, “Pursuing the Past,” collection autobiographique, Archives Passe-Mémoire, (Montreal), 30. White, a plumber, then a typographer, was a party member for thirty years and played a role in the Windsor Ford strike of 1945. For a while he was editor of the United Auto Workers bi-weekly *Ford Facts*.
- 8 Kashtan, “Living in One’s Own Time,” 212. He was also proud to play *The Internationale* with the twenty-mandolin orchestra at the openings of meetings.
- 9 White, “Pursuing the Past,” 30–1.
- 10 Ibid., 31.
- 11 Andrée Lévesque, *Red Travellers: Jeanne Corbin and Her Comrades* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2006), 23–4. The camps were not just for recreation, and the campers had to plough through the canons of Marx, Lenin, Stalin, and also Palme Dutt and Gustavus Myers. The curriculum, developed in Toronto, was approved by Moscow.
- 12 Ryerson, “Comrade Beth,” 153–4. These discussions took place in “section 13,” an underground section that protected professional members who had to keep their membership secret. But section 13 was not purely elitist, and speakers/coordinators included Fred Rose, then a young factory worker, and Emery Samuel who started work as a lumberjack in the Gaspé.
- 13 Ibid., 154–5.
- 14 Library and Archives Canada (LAC), Communist International fonds, MG 10-K3, R14860-0-3-E, reel K-269, 495.72.176, Anglo American Secretariat, Speaker Morgan, 2 July 1932.
- 15 LAC, R14860-0-3-E, K-269, 495.72.190, Anglo American Secretariat, Meeting on Canada, Speaker Morgan, 23 July 1932.
- 16 Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv sotsial’no-politicheskoi istorii (RGASPI), f. 495, op. 222, d. 31, Évariste Dubé; RGASPI, 495.222.158, 13 August 1939; Jack Scott and Bryan Palmer, eds., *A Communist Life: Jack Scott and the Canadian Workers Movement, 1927–1985* (St John’s: CCLH, 1988), 15.
- 17 Tom Cacic incarnates the cadre who finds himself at home across borders. He was born in Croatia, organized miners in northern Ontario and

northwest Quebec, was arrested in Toronto with the members of the Central Committee, and was deported after serving his sentence in Kingston penitentiary. In Europe, he found his way to the USSR and from there volunteered for Spain. Cacic spent two years in a concentration camp in France then joined Tito's partisans in Yugoslavia. David Yorke in Ronald Liversedge, *Mac-Pap: Memoirs of a Canadian in the Spanish Civil War*, edited by David Yorke (Vancouver: New Star Books, 2013), 194–5. Denis Molinaro, “‘A Species of Treason’?: Deportation and Nation-Building in the Case of Tom Cacic,” *Canadian Historical Review* 91, no. 1 (March 2010): 61–85.

¹⁸ Kashtan, “Living in One’s Own Time,” 220.

¹⁹ The secretary of the delegation wrote that, in 1930, Canada was probably the only country in the Western world not to have sent a delegation of workers and farmers to observe the accomplishments of the communist world. Provincial Archives of Ontario (AO), Communist Party of Canada Papers (CPCP), RG 64-32 box 11, 24, 11 C 2920, M. Shur, Canadian Workers’ Committee for a Working Women’s Delegation to the Soviet Union, 27 January 1930. Of the many fellow-travellers who visited the Soviet Union, social worker Rose Henderson is fairly typical in that upon her return, in 1924, she wrote articles and gave numerous speeches in praise of the Russian Revolution and social services in the USSR. Peter Campbell, *Rose Henderson: A Woman for the People* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2010), 105–9.

²⁰ For an account of the 1930 Canadian women’s delegation, see Lévesque, *Red Travellers*, 140–2. It was understood that “before she consents to put her name forward [she] shall make a pledge to be on her return from the Soviet Union, at the complete disposal of the Central Committee, and to embark on any activities that the National Committee may demand in conformity with her ability” (140).

²¹ Archives Passe-Mémoire, Fonds Beatrice Ferneyhough, APM 10/S5. “Bea” Ferneyhough (1908–1996) was a journalist and writer.

²² Nicole Lacelle, ed., *Entretiens avec Madeleine Parent et Lea Roback* (Montréal: Éditions du Remue-Ménage, 1988), 152.

²³ “Pour créer le ‘militant inflexible de la cause prolétarienne,’ modèle proposé par la formation des cadres.” Brigitte Studer, “L’être perfectible. La formation du cadre stalinien par le «travail sur soi»,” *Genèses* 51 (2003/2), 94. See Lisa A. Kirschenbaum, *International Communism and the Spanish Civil War: Solidarity and Suspicion* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 15–51. For Belgian students at the ILS, see José Gotovitch, “Des élèves belges à l’école du communisme, 1926–1940,” in

- Les montagnes russes vécues par les Belges*, edited by Paul Aron and Paul Janssens (Bruxelles: Eddy Stols Emmanuel Waegemans, 1989), 195–209.
- For Latin-American students, see Víctor Jeifets and Lazar Jeifets, “La Comintern y la formación de militantes comunistas latinoamericanos,” *Izquierdas*, no. 31 (December 2016), 130–61.
- 24 Brigitte Studer, *The Transnational World of the Cominternians* (London: Palgrave, 2015), 90–3.
- 25 It seems that students from different countries could mix in the communal dormitories, but no one wrote about those contacts. Kirschenbaum mentions German and Chinese students in the same dorm. Kirschenbaum, *International Communism*, 30.
- 26 Ibid., 34.
- 27 Brigitte Studer, “Penser le sujet stalinien,” in *Le sujet communiste. Identités militantes et laboratoire du “moi”*, edited by Claude Pennetier et Bernard Pudal (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2014), 41. The CPC sent fewer than one hundred students over twelve years, roughly the same as numbers from Greece, Rumania, and Bulgaria. Alastair Kocho-Williams, “Stalin’s Students: The International Lenin School, 1926–1938,” 2013, http://www.academia.edu/5615677/Stalin_s_Students_the_International_Lenin_School_1926-1938.
- 28 Jeifets and Jeifets, “La Comintern,” 135.
- 29 LAC, Communist International fonds, MG 10 K3, reel 8, K276, file 61, J. MacDonald to W. Gallagher, 4 February 1928.
- 30 Ibid.
- 31 LAC, Communist International fonds, MG 10 K3, reel 8, K276, file 67, “Proposed draft closed letter to the Communist Party of Canada submitted to the Politsecretariat by the Anglo-American Secretariat,” 11 September 1929.
- 32 Stewart Smith, *Comrades and Komsomolks: My Years in the Communist Party of Canada* (Toronto: Lugus, 1993), 94–6.
- 33 Claude Pennetier and Bernard Pudal, “Communist Prosopography in France: Research in Progress based on French Institutional Communist Autobiographies,” in *Agents of the Revolution: New Biographical Approaches to the History of International Communism in the Age of Lenin and Stalin*, edited by Kevin Morgan, Gidon Cohen, and Andrew Flinn (New York: Peter Lang, 2005), 21–36.
- 34 Fortin, RGASPI, 495.222.158, 7. Évariste Dubé, who did not attend the ILS but travelled to Moscow and became a member of the Central Committee, started working as a fisherman at age twelve in Grande-Rivière, Gaspé.
- 35 Studer, “L’être perfectible,” 104.

- 36 Peter Hunter, *Which Side Are You On Boys: Canadian Life on the Left* (Toronto: Lugsus, 1988), 82.
- 37 Smith, *Comrades*, 101.
- 38 Ibid., 102.
- 39 See Studer, “L’être perfectible,” 92. It is not our intention here to enter into the debate over the “control function” of the ILS, between Kevin Morgan and Gidon Cohen on the one hand, and Alan Campbell et al. on the other. See *Twentieth Century British History* 13 (2002): 327–55, and *Twentieth Century British History* 15 (2004): 51–76.
- 40 The use of pseudonyms was not restricted to the Lenin School: Stanley Bréhaut Ryerson wrote under the name of E. Roger, and Jeanne Corbin, who never made it to Moscow, was Jeanne or Jeannette Harvey.
- 41 Autobiographies could also be written for the national party and these varied in length. In France, the cadres would have to answer seventy-eight questions in 1937. Pennetier and Pudal, “Communist Prosopography in France,” 24.
- 42 Peter Hunter, RGASPI, 495.222.36.
- 43 Évariste Dubé, RGASPI, 495.222.31.
- 44 Peter Hunter mentions that his two brothers are party members, and that his father is secretary of the Hamilton council of the Labour Defense League while his family is on relief. Hunter, 495.222.36. Willie Fortin says that his brother is sympathetic to the party, and that an uncle and aunt receive *Clarté* and help the party financially. Willie Fortin, RGASPI 495.222.158.
- 45 RGASPI, 495.222.438, 9.
- 46 RGASPI, 495.222.158, 7.
- 47 Dubé, RGASPI, 495.222.31.
- 48 It is not the purpose of this chapter to do a prosopography of the Canadian communists who left autobiographical writings, but one notices how most of them left school early, sometimes at eleven, to start work. Once in the labour force, they jumped from one job to the other, sometimes at the request of the party, like Delisle who quit his job in a cigar store to become a French organizer of the Industrial Needle Trade Workers.
- 49 Fortin, RGASPI, 495.222.158, 7; Peter Hunter, RGASPI, 495.222.36, 33; Évariste Dubé, RGASPI, 495.222.31.
- 50 Fortin, RGASPI, 495.222.158, 7, 13 August 1939.
- 51 Hunter, RGASPI, 495.222.36, 1940.
- 52 Dubé, 495.222.31. See Lévesque, “Évariste Dubé, un Gaspésien communiste,” *Magazine Gaspésie*, 187 (Novembre 2016–Février 2017): 41–3.

- 53 Brigitte Studer, "Liquidate the Errors or Liquidate the Person? Stalinist Party Practices as Techniques of the Self," in *Stalinist Subjects: Individual and Systems in the Soviet Union and the Comintern, 1929–1953*, edited by Brigitte Studer and Heike Haumann (Zurich: Chronos, 2006), 203.
- 54 Hunter, *Which Side Are You On Boys*, 95.
- 55 Delisle, RGASPI, 495.222.438, 27 September 1934.
- 56 Kirschenbaum, *International Communism*, 17.
- 57 We do not know how many Canadian women attended the Lenin School, but Berthe Caron was exceptional as only 12.7 per cent of the total students were women. *Ibid.*, 30.
- 58 Emery Samuel in *Clarté*, 24 April 1937: 7.
- 59 Their numbers vary. Hunter writes: "Five of our group, did go to Spain" (102). He is presumably referring to the fourteen Canadians who arrived at the ILS at the same time. Victor Hoar wrote: "of the 14 Canadians at the School in 1937, half left for Spain." *The Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion: The Canadian Contingent in the Spanish Civil War* (Toronto: Copp Clark, 1969), 40.
- 60 Ted Allan, *This Time a Better Earth* (New York: W. Morrow and Co., 1939). Material on Canada and the Spanish Civil War, including memoirs, letters, and interviews, has been digitized by the Canadian Cultural History about the Spanish Civil War, <http://spanishcivilwar.ca/introduction>.
- 61 William Kashtan and Roy Davis, *War in Spain: An Eye-Witness Account* (Toronto, 1937).
- 62 "The Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion in Spain," *Marxist Quarterly* 18 (Summer 1966): 1–77.
- 63 Larry Hannant, "My God, Are They Sending Women?" Three Canadian Women in the Spanish Civil War," *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* 15, no. 1 (2004), 159.
- 64 Ryerson, "Comrade Beth," 156.
- 65 "Letter from Dr Bethune to the Committee in Aid of Spanish Democracy," cited in Dorothy Livesay, *Right Hand Left Hand* (Toronto: Press Porcopic, 1977), 243.
- 66 William Kardash, *I Fought for Canada in Spain* (Toronto: New Era, 1938), 5.
- 67 Liversedge, *Mac-Pap*, 73; Kardash, *I Fought*, 8.
- 68 Kardash, *I Fought*, 6.
- 69 Gérard Fortin, *Life of the Party* (Montréal: Véhicule Press, 1984), 88–9. Gérard Fortin is not related to Willie Fortin.
- 70 White, "Pursuing the Past," 113.
- 71 Lacelle, *Entretiens*, 141.

72 LAC, MG 28, IV, V, (CPC), Jeanne Corbin to Helen Burpee, London, Ontario, 11 April 1944.

73 Hunter, *Which Side Are You On Boys*, 115.

Between the Comintern, the Japanese Communist Party, and the Chinese Communist Party

Nosaka Sanzo's Betrayal Games

Xiaofei Tu

In the early 1990s, the Japanese media outlet *Shukan Bunshun* revealed that, in the 1930s, Nosaka Sanzo, co-founder and long-time leader of the Japanese Communist Party (JCP), reported to the Comintern concerning his comrade Yamamoto Kenzo, who was consequently killed in a Stalinist purge. The revelation sent shock waves through the Japanese political landscape, especially within the left. Despite the sensation it created in Japan, this event has not been fully analyzed in English-language scholarship. In the first part of this chapter, I shall attempt to reconstruct the event by critically using Japanese sources such as autobiographies, media reports, and the JCP journals. Then I shall proceed to investigate another incident involving Nosaka's betrayal of his comrade to the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Through these two case studies, I explore and analyze the tension between the JCP and its leaders' national identity on the one hand, and their internationalist political agendas on the other.

NOSAKA AND YAMAMOTO KENZO

30 March 1992 marked the hundredth birthday of Nosaka Sanzo (野坂 参三), a lifelong revolutionary, the leader of the JCP from 1955 to 1982, and the party's honorary chairman since his retirement. The year also marked the seventieth anniversary of the JCP's establishment in 1922, with Nosaka being one of founding members. Without

exaggeration, Nosaka was a living witness to the party's history. A large celebration was thrown in Nosaka's honor. Cheering party comrades shouted out their adoration for him and wished him longevity. The warm feeling and pompous commemoration call to mind a similar scene, half a century earlier. In 1946, Nosaka returned home to Japan after sixteen years of overseas work for the Comintern in Moscow and at the Chinese Communist Party headquarters in Yan'an, China. As an underground fighter resisting the bellicose Japanese wartime government, and a protégé of Stalin and Mao Zedong, Nosaka was received as a triumphant hero by the Japanese communists, socialists, and other left-wing groups, who had recently gained legal status under the Allied occupation. Thirty thousand people lined up in Tokyo's Hibiya Park awaiting Nosaka's arrival. Among them were leaders of the communist and socialist parties and labour movements, such as Yamakawa Hitoshi (山川均, cofounder of the JCP), Katayama Tetsu (片山哲, future prime minister of Japan), Arahata Kanso (荒畑寒村, former JCP leader and a member of the Socialist Party), as well as other famous public intellectuals. A marching band played an anthem called "Welcome to Comrade Nosaka," with such lyrics as "The brave soldier has returned, the time for revolution is drawing closer." With ample emotion, Yamakawa announced that Nosaka's return was the equivalent of the arrival of a million of soldiers. Nosaka's reputation reached its peak at this moment, and he quickly began co-leading the JCP with Tokuda Kyuichi (徳田 球一); the latter was admired by party members for the fact that he had kept his faith in communism and loyalty to the party during the eighteen years he spent in prison.¹

Indeed, the Japanese left's high expectations for Nosaka were not unjustified. In prewar Japan, the Japanese Communist Party's membership had never exceeded one thousand.² After the great suppression by the authorities in 1928, most JCP leaders had been either in prison or in exile until the end of the Second World War. With systematic training in orthodox Marxist-Leninism and abundant international experience, Nosaka had much to offer to a JCP trying to rejuvenate itself. In addition, Nosaka was a soft-spoken person (his speech was jokingly likened to a mosquito's voice by one audience member), and had the air of a British gentleman. His promise to lead a "lovable Communist Party" (愛される共産党) gained many supporters among non-communists.

Nosaka's hometown was Yamaguchi Prefecture, in the western part of Honshu. In his book *The People in the Land of Japan*, Soichi Oya describes Yamaguchi as the birthplace of both power brokers and

rebels. Since the time of Emperor Meiji, nine out of a total of sixty-two Japanese prime ministers have come from this area. On the other hand, Yamaguchi has produced a number of prominent leaders of the Japanese Communist Party: Kawakami Hajime (河上 肇), Shiga Yoshio (志賀 義雄), Miyamoto Kenji (宮本顕治), and Nosaka Sanzo. Nosaka was born in 1892 to a small merchant's family. After the death of his parents, Nosaka moved to Kobe and Tokyo for his education. In college he grew sympathetic to socialism, inspired largely by the works of the famous anarchist Kotoku Shusui (幸徳 秋水). Soon Nosaka joined the socialist movement and became the editor of two journals: *Social Reform* and *Labor Movement*. After the Bolshevik Revolution, Nosaka was drawn to Marxism and Leninism. According to an anecdote, a conservative professor gave his student Nosaka a copy of *The Communist Manifesto* and asked him to criticize it for a writing assignment. Instead, Nosaka was fascinated and totally persuaded by the small book.³ In 1920, Nosaka visited Britain for the purpose of studying European labour movements and there he joined the British Communist Party. In 1922, Nosaka was among the first members of the newly founded Japanese Communist Party. After the domestic political environment turned unviable under the infamous 1925 Peace Preservation Law (治安維持法) that targeted communists and other radical political activists, Nosaka fled to the United States and eventually arrived in Moscow in 1931. In 1935, as a representative of the JCP, Nosaka became one of forty-six members of the ECCI, an honour that few of his Japanese comrades shared. Furthermore, Nosaka spent the early part of the 1940s in Yan'an and cultivated personal relationships with Mao and other leaders and middle-echelon cadres of the Chinese Communist Party.⁴

All these dazzling credentials as a veteran in international communist movements paved the way for Nosaka to be a decision-making member of the top leadership of the JCP, after his return to Japan in 1946. In particular, Nosaka's personal mark on the JCP was his theory of a peaceful transformation from capitalism to communism in Japan. Nosaka envisioned non-violent social changes because he considered the postwar democratic regime introduced by the US occupying forces to be conducive to such changes. This unorthodox theory was not uncontroversial among his Japanese comrades, given that Lenin had implied in his *State and Revolution* that a violent proletarian revolution was always necessary. Things got much more complicated when the Soviets unexpectedly intervened on this issue. In 1950, as the Cold

War and a potential Third World War loomed, Stalin decided that the communist parties in some non-communist countries should take up arms. Under such circumstances, Nosaka's theory of peaceful transformation was openly criticized by the Cominform, the postwar reincarnation of the dissolved Comintern. In January 1950, an article concerning the situation in Japan appeared in the Cominform journal *For Lasting Peace, For People's Democracy*, and the same article was also published in *Pravda*. The article critiqued Nosaka's theory for glorifying the US imperialists occupying Japan and deceiving the Japanese people. The Cominform's conclusion was that Nosaka's theory was both anti-socialist – it betrayed Marxism and Leninism – and unpatriotic. These serious charges, coming from a source that had little tolerance for dissent, caught the JCP off guard and created considerable confusion and infighting within the party. Eventually, the JCP leadership decided to own up to its "mistake" and follow the Moscow line.⁵

From the outset of this line change, the JCP was pushed by Moscow to engage in military struggles. The JCP acquired weapons from abroad, attempted to build military bases in rural areas, and ordered its members to attack Japanese police and US occupying personnel in the hope of a quick communist victory. This new strategy turned out to be disastrous. The JCP's attacks were easily thwarted, as their military power was obviously underwhelming in the face of formidable enemies. The US occupying forces responded to the JCP armed struggles with the 1950 Red Purge, outlawing "violent and antidemocratic" political groups. The JCP leaders, including Nosaka, were forced out of Japan and ended up operating secretly in China. Luckily for the JCP, the international situation soon turned in its favour. After the truce in Korea and the death of Stalin in 1953, the new Soviet leadership adopted a reconciliatory position in the international arena. A treaty was signed by the Soviet Union and Japan, officially marking the end of war between the two countries. As part of the under-the-table negotiations between the Japanese government and Moscow, the JCP gave up military agitation in exchange for their return to Japanese parliamentary politics. In the meantime, the JCP openly acknowledged its past missteps to its members.⁶ To the surprise of many observers, the JCP was able to recover from its political miscalculations and was soon back on its feet. Personally, Nosaka was successfully reintegrated into the Japanese parliamentary system.

Beginning in 1956, Nosaka was elected as a senator for four consecutive terms and was active in the Senate for more than twenty years. In 1977, he retired from the Senate; in 1982, he resigned as the JCP chairman to become the honorary chair of the party. Nosaka's life might well have ended with his reputation as a picture-perfect communist fighter intact, but events took a drastic turn shortly after his hundredth birthday. The result was that Nosaka was stripped of his position in the party and his party membership at the very end of his life.

It all began with the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989, after which many of the contents of the former country's gigantic archives were made public. The newly available documents not only shed new light on the history of the Soviet Union, but also provided opportunities to better understand the history of international communist movements, and the history of the twentieth century in general. It was in this context that Japanese scholars were able to make new gains in understanding the prewar JCP.

The first probes into the Soviet archives were carried out by reporters at Fuji TV. In 1991, their reporters first obtained previously classified KGB documents about four Japanese ex-patriots who had been arrested and executed during the Russian purges of the 1930s purges. The investigations led to a documentary that aired on Fuji TV. Reporters at the public television station NHK followed suit, travelling to Russia to access the former Soviet Union Communist Party documents. Their purpose was to film a documentary on the Tokyo Military Tribunal (also known as the International Military Tribunal of the Far East), which was to be aired on 15 August 1992, the anniversary of the 1945 Japanese surrender to the Allied Forces. The Tokyo Military Tribunal was a court created by the Allies to try Japanese military leaders and the politicians who had campaigned for and carried out the war – a crime against peace and international order. A key issue for the tribunal was the responsibility of the Japanese emperor. After intensive debate and deliberation, the court decided not to persecute the emperor, a decision that had profound political and ethical implications. The NHK staff intended to investigate the Russian attitude towards this issue by combing through the Russian archives. Inadvertently, they uncovered unrelated information, including shocking new revelations of the relationships between the Comintern and the Japanese Communist Party. Building on previous investigations, two reporters, Kobayashi Shunichi and Kato Akira

from the journal *Shukan Bunshun* (週刊文春), discovered a letter dated 23 February 1939 from Nosaka to Georgy Dimitrov, the head of the Comintern. Based on this letter, they wrote a series in 1992, the first part of which was titled: "Nosaka, the Letter that Betrayed a Comrade."

The stories they discovered were as follows. Nosaka first visited the Soviet Union in 1931. It was rumoured that in order to flee the country and evade police surveillance, Nosaka left Japan disguised as a woman, with the help of makeup artists from the Takarazuka Revue (宝塚歌劇団) who specialized in gender-bending performances. In Moscow, Nosaka encountered Yamamoto Kenzo (山本 懸蔵), a famous early JCP member and labour organizer who had arrived there earlier. Yamamoto joined the JCP right after its founding in 1922. His outgoing personality and excellent leadership skills made him a member of the Central Committee of the JCP. Having been arrested by the Japanese authorities a few times for his political activities, Yamamoto was eventually forced to go to Moscow to serve as a representative of the Japanese Communist Party. He never returned to his native Japan. It seemed that Nosaka and Yamamoto were not on friendly terms. According to one report, they did not even say hello when running into each other.

Nosaka's work in Moscow in the 1930s mainly consisted of writing reports on JCP activities for the Comintern and transmitting Comintern policies to the JCP. It was during this time that Nosaka wrote the letter that, more than half a century later, would scandalize the JCP. The disquieting content of Nosaka's letter concerned Yamamoto, and the letter supposedly led to Yamamoto's arrest and death. Before the *Shukan Bunshun* discovery, the JCP and Nosaka had been ambiguous and evasive about the fate of overseas Japanese communists executed during the Stalinist purges. In 1962, Nosaka acknowledged that Yamamoto had been arrested by the Soviets, but he maintained that he had died of sickness in prison in 1942. Nosaka said the arrest had occurred when he was away from Moscow and that he was taken aback when he heard the news. Nosaka also claimed that he and Yamamoto were close friends who would have laid down their lives for each other. In Nosaka's own words, "How could he [Yamamoto] be arrested in a socialist country? I knew he had pneumonia, what would become of him in prison? I was so troubled."⁷ In 1973, Nosaka suggested that a monument be erected in honour of Yamamoto in the latter's hometown. Nosaka personally drafted and

hand-wrote the script for the monument. Besides typical praise for a deceased party comrade, the monument declared that Yamamoto had been unjustly arrested in the Soviet Union, and that according to the investigation of JCP and the information provided by the Soviet government, Yamamoto died in 1942 in an unknown location.

However, Nosaka's story did not convince everyone. There had always been suspicion among party members regarding Yamamoto's final fate. At certain party meetings when Nosaka was giving a speech, someone in the audience would shout the question: "What happened to Yamamoto?" – leaving Nosaka standing there, deeply embarrassed.⁸ Despite party members' doubts, Nosaka's story of what happened was documented in the 1978 version of the JCP's official history. In 1992, however, it was announced in the JCP's newspaper *Shimbun Akahata* (赤旗) (*Red Flag*) that Yamamoto had in fact been executed in 1939, together with a few other Japanese communists living in Moscow. According to *Shimbun Akahata*, a Soviet court charged Yamamoto with being a Japanese government spy and a member of an anti-revolutionary organization. The charge was based on the confessions of other arrested Japanese communists, as well as Yamamoto's own, which had obviously been obtained under physical and psychological pressure.

Contrary to what had been recorded in earlier official JCP histories and Nosaka's postwar memoir, where Nosaka claimed that he was initially unaware of Yamamoto's fate and had even confronted Dimitrov about his arrest, the newly discovered letter in *Shukan Bunshun* revealed that Nosaka had told the Comintern that he suspected Yamamoto to be an anti-Soviet spy and had more than once volunteered to give "evidence" against him. According to the letter, Nosaka had early on written to Dimitrov about Yamamoto's "suspicious activities." Nosaka continued to say that while the revolutionary Soviet Union was exposing Trotsky's followers and Japanese spies at full speed, it was his responsibility to report on any potential enemies. Nosaka's evidence against Yamamoto included the following: in 1923, Yamamoto had twice escaped police searches while every other party member at the same locations was arrested; in 1928, Yamamoto had escaped arrest again, he was supposedly sick in bed but was not taken away by the police; in 1931, Yamamoto had lost a large amount of money at a hotel, the source of which was unknown; a Japanese communist student bound for Moscow was arrested in Shanghai, with his itinerary arranged by Yamamoto.⁹

It is well known that after Sergei Kirov's assassination in 1934, Stalin accelerated his infamous purges. They had begun with the imprisonment and executions of former rich landowners who held grudges against the communist regime, but soon the targets of the purges included Communist Party members, government officials, and military officers as well. From 1936 to 1939 it is estimated that four to five million people were arrested, 400,000 to 500,000 of whom were executed. Besides Soviet citizens, thousands of foreign nationals died in the purges. Among the Japanese communists residing in Moscow, even the daughter of the well-respected JCP godfather Katayama Sen (片山 潜) was arrested; when Katayama had passed away in Moscow in 1933, Stalin had carried his coffin in the funeral procession, which attests to the former's status in the international communist movements. During the purge, the Comintern announced that just as all overseas Germans were naturally Nazi agents, all overseas Japanese were Japanese government spies.¹⁰

Thus Nosaka had good reason to be worried. When he was collecting international reactions to Soviet events for the Comintern, he translated a US report to the effect that he (i.e., Nosaka) had been arrested in Moscow. He dutifully passed along the translation to his Comintern superior. We may reasonably suppose that Nosaka was worried that this false report could become true at certain point, and he would certainly do whatever it took to prevent it from happening. One thing Nosaka did to protect himself was to praise Stalin's purge of old Bolsheviks as the righteous punishment for anti-revolutionaries, and to condemn those who dismissed the conflict as infighting. In particular, he called Stalin's main rival Trotsky an ally of the Japanese military, linking Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution to the continual military aggressions of the Japanese military warlords. He also asserted that certain middle-ranking Soviet officials who had been executed were in the pay of the Japanese government.¹¹ Under such circumstances, it would have been self-evident to Nosaka what his letter to Dimitrov would do to the accused Yamamoto. And it is reasonable to infer that there is a direct link between the letter and Yamamoto's execution.¹² (Nosaka was hardly alone in informing on his comrades. In fact, it has been discovered that before Yamamoto became a victim of Nosaka's secret reports, Yamamoto himself had implicated several Japanese communists in Moscow and had been planning to inform on Nosaka to the Comintern.)¹³

To its credit, the JCP reacted quickly to the revelation. On 21 September 1992, Nosaka's now infamous letter was published in

full in the newspaper *Shimbun Akahata*. After its own independent investigation of the same evidence, the JCP moved to strip Nosaka of his position as the honorary chairman of the Central Committee. According to the JCP, Nosaka had conspired with the Soviet Union and betrayed Yamamoto. Moreover, he had concealed the facts from the party. It was also discovered that in order to disguise his own dishonourable actions, Nosaka had purposely changed the date of Yamamoto's death in the article he wrote honouring Yamamoto's memory. Furthermore, Nosaka had used his connections and influence in Russia to obstruct Yamamoto's wife's return to Japan, so that an inconvenient witness would not be present in Japan. The JCP announced that they disowned Nosaka, for the reason that Nosaka had supported the Stalinist purge out of a selfish motivation to protect himself. In addition, Nosaka had been in secret contact with the Communist Party of the Soviet Union since 1962, violating the JCP's constitution and policies. Nosaka's actions, the JCP said, were not just unworthy of a communist, but shameful for any human being. The decision to take away Nosaka's party membership was announced in *Shimbun Akahata* and the announcement took up a whole page. In the next year, Fuwa Tetsuzo, then the chair of the JCP, wrote a lengthy article under the title "In Regard to the Interference with and Espionage on the Japanese Communist Party: From the Soviet Communist Secret Documents." In the article, Fuwa reiterated the charges against Nosaka while trying to defend the JCP. Regarding *Shukan Bunshun*'s report that the Soviet Union had used the funds of left-wing labour organizations to bankroll the JCP, Fuwa responded that such funds were received by Nosaka and other members in the party leadership without the party's approval. Fuwa further claimed that Nosaka undertook such dealings as a KGB agent serving Soviet interests while undermining the JCP. According to Fuwa, Stalin's decision to declare war on Japan at the end of the Second World War was a selfish bid for Russian dominance in the postwar era. Nosaka was recruited by the KGB and the Red Army Intelligence and sent back to Japan to help carry out Stalin's plan.¹⁴

NOSAKA AND ITO RITSU

History repeats itself. An incident strikingly similar to the one involving Yamamoto was Nosaka's 1952 report to the Chinese Communist Party on Ito Ritsu, the right-hand man of JCP First Secretary Tokuda

Ryuichi and Nosaka's enemy in the JCP. Nosaka's report on Ito led to the latter's arrest and long-time imprisonment by the Chinese Communist Party. The JCP had officially denied any knowledge of Ito's fate, but the Yamamoto incident brought new public scrutiny to the Ito case.

The relationship between the JCP and the Chinese Communist Party began early in the twentieth century. The works of Japanese Marxist Kawakami Hajime had been read all over Asia and especially in China. Prominent Chinese communist leaders such as Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai had openly acknowledged their intellectual debt to Kawakami. In later years, however, it was the JCP that entered into the orbit of the CCP.

It had long been the practice of the Comintern to exert direct, top-down control over its national branches – that is, communist parties in different countries. The Comintern did not like to see horizontal ties between its branches become too close. Why, then, did the Soviets approve of the cooperation between Japanese and Chinese communists, and even give the impression that the JCP was subordinate to the CCP? To answer this question, it is necessary to take note of the fact that Japan and China have much in common culturally and racially, a fact that even Moscow had to recognize. In prewar Japan, law and order were generally well maintained, and the police efficiency was one of the best among nations. As Japan was a largely racially homogeneous state, few Caucasians were seen in prewar Japanese cities. Once there, they would immediately attract attention. That is why the Soviets had to rely on the Chinese communists to help organize the JCP. In contrast to Japan, the Russians could openly go to China to supervise and train their Chinese comrades. This difference had to do with the so-called concessions in prewar China according to which foreign citizens enjoyed extraterritorial rights. The Soviets inherited the rights from the Russian Empire of the tsar, and made use of them to a greater extent than their predecessor.

As mentioned above, Nosaka spent the early part of the 1940s in Yan'an. At the end of the Second World War, Nosaka was instrumental in bringing the CCP into contact with a branch of Japanese military intelligence in China, the Kawaguchi Office, a fact which later contributed to Nosaka's reputation as a multiple (Japanese/Chinese/Russian) agent.¹⁵ After the war, Nosaka returned to Japan armed with the CCP's lessons for a successful military revolution, and became one of the party leaders. But soon, genuine policy differences, mistrust

built up in the prewar years, and personality clashes led to sharp division between two groups within the JCP leadership; the pro-Beijing faction was led by Tokuda and Nosaka, and the pro-Soviet faction was led by Miyamoto. The pro-Beijing faction gained the upper hand over the pro-Soviet faction partly because of the ill feelings that many Japanese people, including JCP supporters, harbored toward the Soviets. Toward the end of the Second World War, Moscow declared war on Japan in spite of the neutrality treaty signed between the two nations. Many Japanese people were disgusted at such a breach of faith. Moreover, the Chinese Communist Party was more generous than the Soviets in their financial support of the JCP. Finally, many top JCP leaders had close personal relationships with Mao and the Chinese Communist Party.

After the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, some of the Japanese workers at the railroads in Manchuria, Japanese intellectuals at various universities, and other Japanese nationals residing in China were selected by the Chinese Communist Party to undergo intensive training and education in the theory and practice of communist revolution. After Nosaka and Tokuda fled to Beijing, a school of Marxism and Leninism to train Japanese communist cadres was formally established with the support of the Chinese Communist Party. These Japanese were sent back to Japan after their training. In 1959, a large group of Japanese in China secretly boarded the Japanese ship *Hakusan Maru* bound for Japan. In a well-reported incident, the ship was captured by the Japanese police. From 1953 to 1956, the Chinese Communist Party sent back at least fifteen groups of Japanese totaling 30,000 people. According to evidence captured by the Japanese law enforcement, most of the Japanese returning from Mainland China either joined the JCP or worked indirectly for it. Many of them were assigned to important positions in the JCP central and the local organizations. For instance, the party branches in Tokyo all came under the control of the pro-China faction.

However, the pro-Beijing faction was further split after Tokuda's debilitating sickness in 1952 and death in 1953. The points of contention were, first, who should succeed Tokuda as the JCP's number one leader, and second, whether the party should reconcile with the pro-Soviet faction. Intense conflicts ensued between two key members of the party leadership: Nosaka and Ito. Ito was a close ally of Tokuda and was especially known for his skills in recruiting and organizing farmers for political movements. When Tokuda left Japan for China

in 1950, Ito for a short period of time was the de facto top JCP leader in Japan. In 1951, Ito joined other JCP leaders in Beijing, and one of his accomplishments there was Free Japan Radio, which broadcasted the JCP programs from China to Japanese audience. Ito had had multiple confrontations with Nosaka when Tokuda was healthy and in full charge of the JCP. Now that Tokuda was gone, Nosaka managed to secure the backing of the CCP in his fight against Ito. A strong contender for the position vacated by Tokuda, Ito nevertheless had vulnerable spots in his past political career. Most seriously, there had been accusations that Ito had cooperated with the police when arrested in 1941, and that the information he gave the police led to the exposure of the well-known Soviet intelligence officer Richard Sorge. While Tokuda had dismissed the accusations and continued to trust Ito, after Tokuda's death Nosaka effectively used the goods on Ito to destroy his personal enemy. Based on Nosaka's report to the Chinese Communist Party, Ito was arrested in Beijing in 1952; in September 1953, he was officially condemned by the JCP as a spy and thereafter disappeared from public view. After returning to Japan, Nosaka openly claimed that he had no knowledge of Ito's whereabouts and whether Ito was alive or dead, just as he had done in the case of Yamamoto. In reality, Ito had been put in a Chinese prison. After twenty-seven years, he was finally released in 1979. In addition, according to the Chinese Communist Party's staff who worked with Nosaka, Nosaka had requested that Ito be executed in China.¹⁶ After the downfall of Nosaka, the JCP asserted that the betrayal of Ito had been Nosaka's personal responsibility and had nothing to do with the party.

THE COMINTERN, THE CHINESE COMMUNIST PARTY, AND THE JCP

Any analysis of the relationship between the JCP and international communist movements must inevitably consider the issue of nationalism and its relationship to communism. Marxism is foremost historical materialism that believes that social systems are determined by the economic base. On the other hand, it also believes in human agency and contends that class struggles and revolutions usher in historical progress. In general, the imperative to intensify class struggle worldwide for the sake of a coming communist society trumps an individual nation's interests or the interests of particular ethnic groups. Speaking about Eastern European peoples' demands for self-determination,

Marx said, “these relics of a nation mercilessly trampled underfoot in the course of history” are always reactionary.¹⁷ Marx had a similar opinion of Asia. For him, the Indian way of life is an “undignified, stagnatory, and vegetative life.” India’s struggles for national liberation were to be considered counterrevolutionary if they took place prior to the creation of a bourgeois economic base.¹⁸ The famous Second International leader Eduard Bernstein lauded a socialist colonialism that would alleviate unemployment in Europe.¹⁹ Similarly for Lenin, the great centralized state was a tremendous step forward from medieval disunity to the future socialist unity of the whole world, and only via such a state could there be any road to socialism. Other conditions being equal, the class-conscious proletariat will always stand for the larger state. We “must fight against small nation narrow-mindedness, seclusion and isolation, consider the whole in general, subordinate the particular to the general interest.”²⁰ Stalin was contemptuous of his own ethnic roots: “Just think, to preserve such national peculiarities of the Transcaucasian Tatars as self-flagellation at the religious festival; or the vendetta of the Georgians!”²¹ Nationalism was useful for the communist cause only insofar as it could be used as a tool to rouse the unrest and war that were to lead to capitalism’s eventual overthrow.

The irony is that communist movements have been national since 1917.²² Furthermore, individual communist parties’ positions and rhetoric on nationalism often changed for tactical reasons. For instance, Stalin blamed Trotsky, his rival in the party who advocated an internationalist approach to communist revolution, for being a “political eunuch” and not believing in the revolutionary will and power of his own fellow Russian people.²³ Hannah Arendt even considered Soviet communism a version of Pan-Slavism.²⁴ Stalin’s actions often showed that he placed Russia’s national interests ahead of a world revolution. For instance, from Nosaka’s writings in Moscow, it is clear that a main concern for the Soviet Union in the 1930s was a possible Japanese invasion of Siberia. Thus the focus of the JCP’s tasks was to do what it could to prevent an imperialist war (i.e., a Japanese invasion of the Soviet Union). Regarding Stalin’s war on Japan at the tail end of the Second World War, Arahata Kansan, a famous socialist who had paid several visits to the Soviet Union, called the Soviet Union a “red imperialist” and conveyed his resentment of Stalin in his autobiography:

Lenin considered the Czarist defeat in the Russo-Japanese War as a prelude to the defeat of despotism and was very pleased by it. 40 years later Stalin considered the defeat of the despotism as a black spot left in the minds of Russian people and said that they had long been waiting for the day to defeat Japan and to get rid of this black plot.²⁵

It is not surprising that from the JCP perspective, the Soviets had been using the JCP as a pawn for Russian national interests in international politics.²⁶ Nosaka's statement after the dissolution of the Comintern in 1943 was illuminating. Nosaka, in Yan'an, was in a celebratory mood when he learned the news about the end of the Comintern. It meant, for him, that the JCP would be free of all Comintern regulations and resolutions; from then on, the JCP would have opportunities to do whatever it wanted without fear. Furthermore, as a result of the dissolution of the Comintern, communist parties in East Asia, especially in China and Japan, had to further cooperate with and assist each other.²⁷ During the 1960s bifurcation of the communist world between China and Soviet Union, all European communists toed the Soviet line and most Asian communist parties sided with China. It seems that national and cultural differences had always lurked beneath the surface of internationalism in the global communist movements after all.

Of interest is the fact that in prewar Japan, socialism was often associated with nationalism, which provided intellectual support for Japan's expansionist policies. Nationalism and socialism may be strange bedfellows in contemporary political discourse, but back in the early twentieth century, they were hardly separable. After all, nationalism had been a "progressive" cause when it first appeared in Europe since it was often anti-religious (people identify themselves with a common ethnicity, language, and culture more than a religious affiliation) and egalitarian (people living within certain national boundaries enjoy the same rights). In Ernest Gellner's term, nationalism is a form of entropy resistance, that is, a new demarcation between "us" and "others" that creates a new order after the collapse of an old social order. The Japanese socialist Motoyuki Takada famously said: "I'm a nationalist because I'm a socialist, and I'm a socialist because I'm a nationalist."²⁸ Indeed, there are intimate connections between Japanese nationalist and socialist ideas. And, as Maruyama

famously said, Japan's prewar nationalist fervor reflected a moral absolutism that dreamt of achieving national glories by bringing absolute justice to Japan and the world. Maruyama also points out that Japanese fascism had the same social base as socialism. Supporters of both ideologies were small business owners and factory workers, while those with some degree of education, such as school teachers, played leadership roles.²⁹ In his 1919 treatise *An Outline Plan for the Reorganization of Japan*, the nationalist Kita Ikki unleashed his diatribe against capitalist greed and in his plan for revolution demanding the confiscation of excessive individual income. When Class A war criminal Oshima Hiroshi studied German in his youth, his readings were the works of German-language socialists Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht. In the 1930s, many JCP leaders such as Sano Manabu (佐野 学) announced their abandonment of communism in favour of nationalism. Their rationale was that the communist internationalism was the same as the Greater East Asian CoProsperity Sphere, a thinly disguised excuse to justify Japan's dominance of Asia. Even to this day, Japanese critics of capitalism enlist prewar nationalists to condemn neoliberalism.³⁰

It is true that the JCP was opposed to Japanese aggression against China from the beginning, while the Japanese socialists and many other Japanese leftists were supportive of the government's war efforts. Indeed, in the international movements, the JCP has a reputation for always having been right on controversial issues. For instance, when it openly denounced the Soviets' interference in 1960s, the JCP became a pariah among its international communist peers who viewed the Soviet Union as the unquestioned leader, "the vanguard of vanguards."³¹ The JCP has since managed to maintain its independence and autonomy, and outlived the Soviet Union. Another example is when North Korean agents kidnapped Japanese citizens in the 1970s and 1980s, the JCP unambivalently condemned North Korea, while the Japanese Socialist Party unwisely denied that the kidnapping had happened and chalked up media reports of the incidents to a right-wing smear campaign. Nevertheless, back in 1930s, the JCP's opposition to the Japanese invasion of China was not as much about internationalism as it was about a single nation – the defense of the Soviet Union's national boundaries, as Stalin reasonably suspected that Siberia would be Japan's next target after China.

In the Yamamoto incident, Nosaka betrayed a compatriot and comrade because he faithfully followed the Comintern's orders and

willingly participated in the frenzy of the purge. In the Ito incident, Nosaka destroyed his political rival by skillfully taking advantage of the Chinese Communist Party's desire to keep the JCP under its guidance and patronage. It seemed that for Nosaka, his loyalty to the global communist cause trumped concerns about national identity. But upon a closer look, one could argue that Nosaka's rationale was that a communist world is the most beneficial for Japan, a "have-not" country at the lower end of the international hierarchy. Thus Nosaka's actions can be considered patriotic on a higher level. In both cases, the most obvious problem we observe is an institutional deficiency (i.e., the way political disagreements are settled in the communist movements, whether they are in power or not). Moreover, selfish motivations such as self-protection and power-hunger might well have played an important role in these incidents. We see in Nosaka competing loyalties to the international communist cause and a national communist party, and the complicated logic of internationalism and national identity in communist movements that have not been satisfactorily articulated in theory or practice.

NOTES

- 1 Kobayashi Shunichi, *Yami no otoko: Nosaka sanzō no hyakunen* (Tokyo: Bungeishunjū, 1993), 10.
- 2 Ichikawa Shōichi, *Riben gongchandang douzheng xiaoshi* (Beijing: Shiji zhishi she, 1954).
- 3 Zhang Dongcai, *Yebancansan yu maogong: Dui rigongyu maogong jiehe shishi zhi boxi* (Taibei: Zhonghua mingguo guoji guanxi yanjiusuo, 1969), 12.
- 4 There is also a report that Mao did not like Nosaka. Mao allegedly said that Nosaka ate Yan'an millet for years but did not learn a thing while there. Ito Ritsu, *Itō ritsu kaisōroku: pekin yūhei nijūshichinen* (Tokyo: Bungeishunjū, 1993).
- 5 Zhang, *Yebancansan yu maogong*, 64.
- 6 Sei Young Rhee, "The Impact of the Sino-Soviet Conflict on the Japanese Communist Party, 1961–1968" (PhD diss., University of Missouri, 1973).
- 7 Nosaka Sanzo, *Nosaka sanzō no ayunda michi* (Tokyo: Shin nihon shuppansha, 1965), 42.
- 8 Wada Haruki, *Rekishi to shite no nosaka sanzō* (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1996), 43.

- 9 Kobayashi, *Yami no otoko*, 15.
- 10 Wada, *Rekishi*, 46.
- 11 Ibid., 44.
- 12 Ibid.
- 13 Kobayashi, *Yami no otoko*.
- 14 Wada, *Rekishi*.
- 15 Zhang, *Yebancansan yu maogong*, 38.
- 16 Nihonkyōsantō, *Chōanpaku to rekishi no shinjitsu*, vol. 4 (Tokyo: Zen'ei, 1998).
- 17 Ronaldo Munck, *The Difficult Dialogue: Marxism and Nationalism* (Atlantic Highlands: Zed Books, 1986), 11.
- 18 Peter Zwick, *National Communism* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1983), 27.
- 19 Ibid., 34.
- 20 Ibid., 72.
- 21 Ibid., 75.
- 22 Ibid., 13.
- 23 Ibid., 27.
- 24 Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (San Diego: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1973).
- 25 Zhang, *Yebancansan yu maogong*, 71.
- 26 Fuwa Tetsuzo, *Soren chūgoku kitachōsen mittsu no haken shugi: Tatakai no kiroku* (Tokyo: Shin nihon shuppansha, 2017).
- 27 Zhang, *Yebancansan yu maogong*, 32.
- 28 Kindai Nihon Shisōshi Kenkyūkai, *Jin dai Riben si xiang shi* (Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1983), 231.
- 29 Maruyama Masao, *Xiandai zhengzhu de sixiang yu xingdong: Jianlun riben junguo zhuyi* (Taibei: Lianjing: 1984), 51.
- 30 Nakatani Iwao and Sato Masaru, *Tero to Kūdetā no jidai go ichi go jiken Ōkawa shūmei jinmonchōsho o yomitoku* (Tokyo: Monthly Nippon, 2009), 13:2.
- 31 Hakamada Satomi, *Wode zhanhou jingli: Yige qiangongchandang ganbu de zhengyan* (Beijing: Shangwu yishuguan, 1980).

PART THREE

Race and Colonialism

Anti-Colonialism and the Imperial Dynamic in the Anglophone Communist Movements in South Africa, Australia, and Britain

Evan Smith

This chapter will compare how anti-colonial politics were embraced by the communist parties in Britain, Australia, and South Africa during the interwar period. Inspired by the October Revolution and the anti-colonial rhetoric of the Communist International (Comintern), communist parties worldwide believed that the proletarian revolution in the global West was tied to the anti-colonial struggle. As Britain was the largest imperial power at the time, communist parties within the British Empire/Commonwealth were seen as vitally important in promoting socialist revolution and engaging in anti-colonial work. The Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB), at the centre of the imperial metropole, was charged with special responsibilities by the Comintern to disseminate anti-colonial propaganda and provide assistance to anti-colonial activists throughout the Commonwealth. Communist parties in the settler colonies, such as South Africa and Australia, were also obliged by Moscow to participate in anti-colonial activities, which was sometimes resisted by these parties at the periphery. This chapter will explore how this internationalist network, based on the pre-existing colonial network of the British Empire, competed with the Moscow-based Comintern's relationship with the CPGB, the Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA), and the Communist Party of Australia (CPA). It will examine how directives flowed from the party in Britain to the CPSA and the CPA, and how this correlated with the directives issued through the Comintern from the Soviet Union. The chapter will argue that

communists in Sydney or Johannesburg had different priorities as communist parties in the periphery, compared with those emanating from London or Moscow.

MOSCOW AND THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNIST MOVEMENT

The debate about the role of the Communist International within the international communist movement has traditionally centred on Moscow's level of control and influence over the individual communist parties. The opening of the Comintern archives in the 1990s led to a revision of the Cold War assertion of Moscow's complete dominance over the national communist parties across the world. Particularly in relation to the CPGB, Andrew Thorpe has written that the Comintern policy was arguably the most important influence on local communists, but the "idea of a solid, unbreakable chain of command from Stalin's office in the Kremlin to the most minor [communist party] member is not one that can be sustained."¹ John McIlroy and Alan Campbell have argued against this, claiming that this "revisionist" history could not obscure the "real, often uncomfortable Russo-British world of what can never be reduced to a native, home-grown Communism."² In another article, McIlroy and Campbell maintained that "the Comintern was *unarguably* the most important influence," as domestic issues may have determined tactics, but "*they did not determine strategy.*"³

Borrowing from the realm of imperial and colonial history, some historians have viewed the Communist International through the prism of the mutually reinforcing centre/periphery, a device developed by historians such as Catherine Hall and Antoinette Burton.⁴ This idea of the importance of the periphery and the symbiotic relationship between the points of empire has informed the work of scholars who study the various communist, worker, and national liberation groups that interacted with the Comintern in the interwar period.⁵ However, as Masha Kirasirova has argued, when considering the Soviet support for anti-colonial struggles in the interwar period, it becomes apparent that "the spatial imagination of Moscow-based organizers appears to be both more ambiguous and contradictory."⁶

From this, new scholarship, primarily around anti-imperialist networks and international solidarity, has shifted away from the centre/

periphery model to a concept of various hubs or metropoles where activists of numerous stripes congregated. Cities, such as London, Paris, Berlin, and New York, have been identified as important epicentres of radical anti-imperialism and communism that interacted with, and also pushed back against, the traditional centre of international communism, Moscow.⁷ These works decentralize the activist networks that existed in the interwar period and highlight how each hub became a sphere of influence for transnational, but also regional, activism. This scholarship also revises the notions of hierarchy in the anti-imperialist and communist networks at this time, teasing out the horizontal links between the actors in the various hubs around the world.

The present chapter uses the ideas of anti-imperial/communist hubs and horizontal relationships to explore the connections between the communist parties in Britain, South Africa, and Australia in the 1920s and 1930s. For the Anglosphere communist parties, London and New York, the de facto centres of the Comintern's Anglo-American Secretariat, became just as influential as Moscow, and links between Sydney and Johannesburg/Cape Town (as well as Wellington and Toronto) emerged as a network of communist parties in the settler colonial sphere. These links were important for the transmission of ideas and strategies separate from the directives that flowed vertically from Moscow and London/New York. In these relationships, the CPSA and CPA also differed – the South Africans were much more receptive to London, while the CPA resisted London's influence and often appealed to Moscow directly. The purpose of this chapter is to explore how the communist networks existing between Britain, South Africa, and Australia diverged from each other, and how this created differing views of how to engage in anti-imperial activism in the interwar period.

ANTI-COLONIALISM AND THE ANGLOPHONE COMMUNIST PARTIES IN THE 1920S

In most Western nations, socialist and workers' parties (many inspired by Marx and Engels) had existed since the late nineteenth century, but the Bolshevik Revolution and the subsequent formation of the Third International had prompted many of these parties to enter into talks about unity and support for the fledgling Soviet Union. In Britain, Australia, and South Africa, a number of smaller parties all agreed to

unite as communist parties in the period between 1919 and 1921. Unlike the mass communist parties that existed in mainland Europe at the time, the CPGB, the CPA, and the CPSA were all numerically very small, and in the shadow of much larger (and electorally significant) labour parties, but they still managed to gain influence in the trade unions.

Particularly in the early 1920s during the Russian Civil War, the Soviet Union placed its hopes in the revolution expanding into Europe, but also across the colonies (especially those that belonged to the defeated imperial powers). The British Empire, while victorious in the First World War, had been firmly shaken by it, and the Russians placed great stock in anti-colonial fervour to rise across the empire. The Communist Party of Great Britain, as the party in the metropole of the largest existing empire, was tasked by the Soviets with coordinating and providing support for anti-colonial rebellions. While smaller than the CPGB, the CPSA and CPA were also expected by the Comintern and by the CPGB to help foster revolution in their spheres of influence.

By the mid-1920s, the worldwide socialist revolution had not occurred and the Bolsheviks had grown less ambitious in their outlook, with the internal dispute over Lenin's successor allowing Stalin to promote the idea of socialism in one country. The corresponding position of the Comintern from 1922–23 to 1928–29 was for communists to build "united fronts" with other sections of the labour movement and to seek unity where possible, to ensure that the ideas of socialism were not entirely overlooked. Although it seemed straightforward in many of the Western nations, in the colonies this position was turned into cooperating with nationalist anti-colonial groups whenever possible, as well as developing communist parties where a critical mass of activists could be located, such as in India or China. In South Africa and Australia, the communist parties took the example of the CPGB and attempted to affiliate to the local Labour parties. While this was fairly straightforward in Britain and Australia (despite the Australia Labor Party's (ALP) dedication to the White Australia Policy), in South Africa, many in the CPSA were disillusioned with a South African Labour Party that was still committed to segregation. Edward Roux, in his memoirs, complained that this directive was handed down from Moscow and London, despite conditions being "obviously quite different in South Africa, where the Labour Party was hardly socialist in practice and made no claim to represent the millions of black workers."⁸

In the British case, Moscow encouraged the CPGB to send liaisons to develop anti-colonial links in the colonies – such as Benjamin Bradley in India and James Crossley in Egypt – as well as cooperating with the Comintern's Colonial Bureau in Berlin, Paris, and Moscow.⁹ Throughout the interwar period, the focus of the party's anti-colonial activism was India. Significant resources and personnel were sent to India, which received extra assistance from the Soviet Union and the Comintern in Berlin (the Communist Party of India was founded in 1925). In 1929, this led to the imprisonment of several British and Indian anti-colonial activists, including one CPGB member, in what was known as the Meerut Conspiracy Trial.¹⁰

While internationalist and anti-colonial in outlook, the CPGB still housed enduring imperialist prejudices. The first was that the party's anti-colonial work was often seen as separate from the rest of the party's work and left to the parties' non-white membership. The two major proponents of the CPGB's anti-colonialism throughout the interwar period were Shapurji Saklatvala and Rajani Palme Dutt.¹¹ Both Saklatvala and Dutt were heavily involved in the party's anti-colonial work, with a predominant focus on India, even though R. Page Arnot was the leading representative of the CPGB's anti-colonialism within Comintern circles (tasked in 1929 with establishing an anti-colonial committee amongst Western European communist parties).¹² This isolation of the party's anti-colonial work was paralleled in the practice of many of the Western communist parties and replicated at the Comintern level. Margaret Stevens has written that “the Comintern created individual organizations, committees and bureaus for addressing what it termed the ‘colonial’ and ‘Negro’ questions, rather than threading the anti-racist and anti-colonial struggles into the fabric of every aspect of the world socialist project. In other words, the fight to liberate people of color around the world from racism and colonialism became a subsidiary – though always significant – struggle within the Communist movement.”¹³

The second assumption was that any postcolonial governments that had broken away from the British Empire would naturally join a socialist Britain in some form of trade agreement. This first emerged in the early 1920s when it was assumed that socialist revolutions would be successful in both the global West and the colonies, leading to an internationalist cooperation of socialist states. As Dutt wrote in 1925: “once capitalism is overthrown, a new and different future opens up. Only when forcible subjection and exploitation is removed, can free productive relations develop. Then, the colonial peoples, freed

at last to carry forward their economic development, will need to enter on an enormous process of transformation, of technical equipment and socialist industrialisation. And in this process the British workers can play a great part, based no longer on dominion and exploitation, but on free fraternal productive relations.”¹⁴

It was also based on the imperialist notion that maintaining or improving the standard of living for the British working class depended upon cheap foodstuffs and raw materials from the colonies.¹⁵ Even when the socialist revolution did not spread elsewhere in the 1920s and 1930s, the CPGB clung to this idea. In a 1936 pamphlet opposing the coronation of King George VI, the party declared: “Thus we shall bring the day nearer when the British Commonwealth will be bound together, not through the personal allegiance to any King-Emperor, but through the class allegiance of worker to worker, when we and our colonial brothers and sisters will be able to join with the workers of other nations in the Socialist Commonwealth of the workers of the world.”¹⁶

SEMI-COLONIAL COUNTRY OR IMPERIAL NATION? THE “AUSTRALIAN QUESTION” IN THE 1920S

In Australia and South Africa, the parties followed the same line as the European parties into united front work, but were at the same time encouraged to foster stronger links with the “natives” and other migrant groups. In South Africa, the 1922 Rand Revolt, pitting white and black workers against each other, was used by the Comintern as a catalyst to castigate the CPSA for not challenging racial prejudice and drafting more black workers into the party. By the late 1920s, the majority of the CPSA’s membership was black, but the leadership positions were mainly occupied by white people.¹⁷ In Australia, the party was criticized for not opposing the White Australia Policy strongly enough and not making enough contacts with Aboriginal workers.

A question that emerged for both the Australian and South African parties was over whether Australia and South Africa were semi-colonial countries or imperial nations in their own right. For the CPA this issue came to a head in 1926 when Hector Ross, representing the CPA, travelled to Moscow to defend the actions of the party over the last half-decade. He came into conflict with the members of the Anglo-American Bureau/Secretariat over the “Australian question.” Alongside

questions over the relationship between the CPA and the Australian Labor Party, the bureau asked about the party's anti-colonial outlook, including its work with the Aboriginal population and efforts against the White Australia Policy.

John Pepper, a Hungarian-American member of the bureau, harshly criticized the Communist Party of Australia in 1926 in response to Ross's report. Pepper called the white working class in Australia "a proletariat with many privileges," a status reinforced by the White Australia Policy.¹⁸ For Pepper, the party "did not fight energetically enough against the White Australia ideology of the workers." He warned that if the CPA "does not want to become something similar to the official Labour Party," it had to combat the White Australia Policy.¹⁹ The following year, the CPA resolution declared: "In opposition to the chauvinistic and racial policy of the A.L.P. as manifested in its White Australia Policy, the C.P. must put forward a policy of opposition to State aided immigration whilst insisting on the elimination of all racial barriers in the Immigration Laws; at the same time formulating a programme for receiving and organizing immigrant workers into the working class movement of Australia."²⁰

The Comintern in its own resolution on the Australian question put forward a similarly conflicted agenda. It proposed that the communist party "must conduct an ideological fight against [the] social chauvinism" of the Australian labour movement, by "championing an internationalist policy," as well as "insisting upon ... free admittance for the workers of all countries."²¹ But at the same time, the Comintern called for the CPA to criticize and condemn the "plans of the British and Australian governments for mass migration."²² Robert Bozinovski has described this approach as the party's "commendable opposition to White Australia in the face of virulent racism," but he also notes that the Comintern continued to complain that the CPA "was not sufficiently vocal in its opposition."²³ Stuart Macintyre has suggested that this contradictory position arose because of the social and political origins of the Communist Party of Australia and its attachment to the international communist movement. "The concern for the purity of the race was a persistent theme of the Australian labour movement," Macintyre explains, and because the CPA was "a by-product of that movement," as well as a "member of an internationalist organization committed to the unity of the workers of the world," the party "found itself torn between old habits and new loyalties."²⁴

Although Australia was a settler colony, the CPA did not see Australia as an imperialist power, but merely as a colony of Britain. In 1926, the Comintern broadly supported this line, calling for “the independence of Australia from the British Empire.”²⁵ The ECCI’s resolution on the Australia question maintained that “the Communist Party of Australia can and will become a Communist Party in the true Leninist sense of the word, when it learns how to combine the fight for the everyday demands of the workers with the combating of the craft spirit of the Labour aristocracy, of the ideology of the ‘White Australia,’ and of British imperialism.”²⁶

However, by the following year, a greater divergence emerged between the position of the leadership of the CPA and the Comintern. CPA leader Tom Wright travelled to Moscow in late 1927 and had a fiery showdown with the ECCI over Australia’s settler colonial status. Representing the ECCI, the Indian communist M.N. Roy proposed:

The struggle against imperialism in Australia is not of the same character as the struggle against imperialism in a colonial or semi-colonial country. The fact that it is part of the British Empire does not give it any of the characteristics of a colonial or semi-colonial country. Australia has all the characteristics of an independent bourgeois state. It is entering the stage of imperialism. It can even be called an incipient imperialist country ... The struggle in Australia is not a social struggle against those backward political, economical and social conditions which prevail in a colonial country. The economical and political conditions in Australia are the same as those prevailing in an independent bourgeois country.²⁷

Wright refused to see Australia as an imperialist power in itself, arguing that “we should make it clear that while Australia may not be in the same position as China, or as a semi-colonial country, or like India, it is still subject to Britain and it is clear to us that Australia itself is not imperialist.”²⁸

The final resolution of the ECCI on the tasks of the Communist Party of Australia, drafted in October 1927, sought to take into account some of Wright’s arguments, but still found that Australia was an emerging imperial power, particularly as it noted Australia’s role in overseeing the protectorate of New Guinea. The resolution stated that the “struggle against British imperialism must on no account interfere

with the struggle against the imperialism of the Australian bourgeoisie,” and it committed the CPA to put up “as energetic a fight against Australia’s direct participation in the oppression of New Guinea.”²⁹ By 1928, the CPA had shifted closer to the Comintern’s position. As it acknowledged in the *Workers’ Weekly*, “Australia has become an imperialist country, with its hold on New Guinea.”³⁰

BOLSHEVIZATION, THE “THIRD PERIOD,” AND THE “NATIVE REPUBLIC” THESIS

Similar debates occurred in South Africa over the nature of the settler colony and how the anti-colonial struggle factored into the activism of the country’s communist party. For the CPSA, South Africa was unlike the other settler colonies, yet it was also not a colonial country. Sidney Bunting wrote in 1928 that South Africa was “not like the all-white colonies of Canada and Australia” (overlooking the Indigenous populations in both countries), but added, “nor yet is it very much like India or China either.”³¹ Bunting suggested that this was primarily because there was “no Negro feudal or landowning class, and no Negro bourgeoisie”; in addition, most of the African peasantry took on a “semi-proletarian character” that was “peculiar to South Africa and one or two other African colonies,” alongside a “considerable white proletariat and peasantry.”³² He likened this to the oppression of African-Americans in the southern states of the US, where “the imperialism under whose lash the Negroes groan is not foreign, but ... local.”³³ In an issue of the *Negro Worker* in 1936, John Marks described the country in the following terms: “South Africa is in theory a British Dominion but in practice a colony in its transition stages. Its Dominion aspect is very much preponderated by its Colonial features. This peculiar Dominion is an agrarian country, with very many rich mineral resources, of which gold occupies the foremost place.”³⁴

The nature of South Africa’s political and economic composition was fiercely contested throughout the interwar period, with many of the older CPSA members arguing that no significant bourgeoisie existed amongst the African population, unlike other colonies such as India or Egypt. Edward Roux argued that because most Africans in South Africa were either workers or semi-proletarian peasants, there was no “native bourgeoisie” to lead the first stage of the national liberation as envisaged by the Comintern.³⁵ This would cause

problems for the CPSA in the late 1920s and early 1930s when the idea of the “Native Republic” was promoted by the Comintern and taken up by a new generation of activists in South Africa.

The Native Republic Thesis was developed primarily in the United States and South Africa. In other settler colonies, such as those in Latin America, some communists proposed that the racialized peoples could, in principle, take their own road to self-determination. In South Africa, some emphasized that the black peasantry did not have to align itself with the demands of white workers and also could achieve self-determination without a black bourgeoisie. This thesis was first developed by African-American CPUSA member Harry Haywood and by Comintern leader Grigory Zinoviev. Their “black belt” thesis proposed that African Americans in the rural American South should agitate for self-determination, which gradually became a demand for full emancipation within (and possible secession from) the United States.³⁶ Scholars debate how much the related thesis in South Africa – the Native Republic Thesis, calling for self-determination and full governing rights for African natives in South Africa, independent of the white working class – was generated within South Africa or imposed from without. In 1930, the newspaper of the CPSA, *Umsebenzi*, published a letter from the Executive Committee of the Comintern (ECCI) that outlined the Native Republic Thesis for South Africa:

The C.I. ... demands that the Party take the initiative in and lead the struggle of the Natives against the foreign yoke under the slogan of an Independent Native Republic.

An Independent Native Republic means, primarily, the return of the land to the landless population and those with little land, which is impossible without liberation from British imperialism and the organization of a revolutionary workers’ and peasants’ government on the basis of Soviets.³⁷

The thesis came out of the idea that black workers did not need to wait for white workers to take their demands seriously, and could radically organize on the basis of their own platform. Yet directives from the Comintern were unclear about the precise nature of these independent native republics and seemed, as the thesis was developed by the ECCI in the early 1930s, to suggest separatism along tribal/ethnic lines.

The divide over the Native Republic Thesis was not necessarily between black and white party members, but rather was generational. Older party members, who had been radicalized during the First World War and early postwar era, generally resisted the line from Moscow. The new leadership rallied against the “right-wing” deviation of “Buntingism,” named after the white party leader Sidney Bunting who was unconvinced by the Native Republic line. Supported by Moscow, a group of younger African CPSA members, including Albert Nzula, Moses Kotane, and Douglas Wolton, a recent migrant from the Communist Party of Great Britain, pushed Bunting and several of his “allies” out of the party (among whom were the Africans William Thibedi and Gana Makabeni). They promised a stronger focus on African issues and greater loyalty to Moscow.³⁸

The Native Republic Thesis also flowed to Australia, where the CPA proposed that rural Aboriginals could form their own republics in central, north, and northwestern Australia.³⁹ Aboriginal workers based in the cities were to be incorporated into the labour movement, which was to demand equal rights and equal pay between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal workers.⁴⁰ The CPA first developed a comprehensive programme for Aboriginal rights in 1931. Among its fourteen points, it called for:

The handing over to the aborigines [*sic*] of large tracts of watered and fertile country, with towns, seaports, railway roads, etc., to become one or more independent aboriginal states or republics. The handing back to the aborigines of all central, Northern, and North West Australia to enable the aborigines to develop their native pursuits. These aboriginal republics to be independent of Australia or other foreign powers. To have the right to make treaties with foreign powers, including Australia, establish their own army, governments, industries, and in every way be independent of imperialism.⁴¹

The CPA also stressed cooperation between white and Aboriginal workers, with an article in the Comintern’s *Inprecor* by the CPA’s general secretary, Herbert Moxon, urging that “no struggle of the white workers must be permitted without the demands of the aborigines being championed, no political campaigns without political programmes applicable to our fellow exploited – the aborigines – being formulated.”⁴²

Although the Communist Party of Australia was a champion of the rights of Aboriginal workers and called for an end to their exploitation, pre-existing ideas about Aboriginal people as an “ancient society” (a hangover from the work of Engels and his praise for Victorian anthropologist Lewis Morgan)⁴³ still informed some of their views – especially with respect to Aboriginal peoples located in remote areas of Australia. For example, long-time Aboriginal rights advocate Michael Sawtell wrote in the *Workers’ Weekly* in 1931 that the communist revolution would “free the workers, both black and white,” but also argued that “if the Aboriginals do not wish to work, they should be allowed to retire on to native reserves.”⁴⁴ The remote areas of Australia, such as Arnhem Land or the Kimberley coast, Sawtell proposed, “would make ideal native reserves as they have very little economic value.”⁴⁵

THE CPSA AND THE REVOLUTION IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

The Comintern had long encouraged the CPSA to undertake activist work in neighbouring countries, particularly the other British colonies in southern and eastern Africa. Although the British communist party was charged by the Comintern with overseeing anti-colonial work across the British Empire, the South African party, like the Australian party in New Guinea, was delegated responsibility for maintaining links with anti-colonial movements within their region.

In the early days of the CPSA, David Ivon Jones, a leading member of the fledgling party who due to ill health remained in Russia between 1920 and 1924, called for the CPGB and the Comintern to develop a Colonial Bureau of the Communist International, partly to nurture anti-colonial sentiment in Africa. Regarding British rule in East Africa, Jones suggested: “Such matters might ... receive the attention of the Comintern, giving a lead directly or through the British Communist Party, and thus enhance its prestige as the defender of the unprotected working masses of the Colonies.”⁴⁶

In 1923, the Comintern directed the CPSA to “reach the Negroes of southern Africa,” including “Mozambique, German East and British West Africa, and Rhodesia.”⁴⁷ The directive said that “your delegates informed us that you would be able to penetrate these parts and possibly obtain representatives of the natives to attend the [“International Negro”] conference.”⁴⁸ However, Jones had admitted a few months

earlier to the ECCI that the CPSA had “no connections” in British East Africa, British Nigeria, or the Gold Coast, though they did have correspondents in the Belgian Congo.⁴⁹ Jones also lamented that they had no connections with the French Congo, “unless this can be worked through the French Communist Party.”⁵⁰

In 1929, Douglas Wolton reported to the ECCI that the CPSA had made inroads in Basutoland through contact with a peasant organization named Lekhotla la Bafo, and attempts were being made link up with activists in the Transkeian territories.⁵¹ Elizabeth Ceiriog Jones has characterized Lekhotla la Bafo as a “conservative nationalist movement” that entered into a relationship with the CPSA “based on mutual need rather than ideological compatibility.”⁵² Still, Edward Roux claims that the leadership of Lekhotla la Bafo, the Lefela brothers, wrote numerous articles for the CPSA journal, the *South African Worker*, and Josiah Gumede, the pro-communist leader of the African National Congress, spoke at their meetings.⁵³ Albert Nzula also spoke at a Lekhotla la Bafo meeting the following year, although Gumede did not attend to avoid arrest by the British colonial authorities.⁵⁴

In the early 1930s, the Comintern further encouraged the CPSA to distribute its material in neighbouring countries, instructing that *Umsebenzi* be sold in South West Africa, Northern and Southern Rhodesia, and in the Belgian Congo.⁵⁵ Lucien van der Walt has shown that the CPSA reached small circles of skilled manual workers and white-collar professionals in South West Africa and in Southern Rhodesia in the 1930s and 1940s.⁵⁶ The author Doris Lessing was part of a covert Left Book Club that operated within the Southern Rhodesian Labour Party and also distributed the CPSA-aligned *Guardian* newspaper during the 1940s.⁵⁷

THE POPULAR FRONT ERA

The Third Period was disastrous for most communist parties. In Britain and South Africa, membership collapsed. But the damage was repaired by the Popular Front strategy that was developed from 1933 onwards and officially announced at the Seventh Comintern Congress in 1935. This meant that communist parties were to ditch the sectarianism of the previous five years and proceed to work with the bourgeoisie and other reformist elements to prevent the onslaught of fascism. In Britain, this meant working with the Labour Party if not the national government (both of which favoured retaining the

empire), and many accused the CPGB of promoting anti-fascist alliances above the struggle against imperial exploitation.

The Popular Front boosted the fortunes of the communist parties in Britain, Australia, and South Africa, but the focus of these parties was fighting fascism (both locally and internationally), which meant that all likely allies against fascism, including pro-imperialist sections of society, were embraced. Drew notes that this was easier in Britain than in South Africa, where “the colour bar meant virtually no Labour Party politicians were willing to support Communist campaigns.”⁵⁸

The governments in each country were denounced more for their appeasing attitudes to Nazi Germany, their non-cooperation in the Spanish Civil War, and the continued hostility towards the USSR, than for the continued imperialism of the British Commonwealth (which the British Empire became in 1931). However, the parties did not entirely give up on promoting anti-colonial politics. The CPGB pushed the notion that an independent India could become a bulwark against the “fascist” expansionism of the Japanese, while in South Africa, black workers were seen as natural allies against fascism and racism.

Some scholars, such as Neil Redfern, claim that the Popular Front period greatly hindered the anti-colonial movements, as the Western communist parties, particularly the CPGB, were encouraged to align themselves with mainly the pro-imperial British bourgeoisie, breaking the anti-colonial alliances built in the 1920s.⁵⁹ Other scholars, such as Marika Sherwood, describe the history of the CPGB’s anti-colonial work as “a sorry tale,” alleging that despite “ample information ... of oppression [of colonial subjects] in Britain and in the colonies,” the party “as a whole ... did nothing.”⁶⁰ John Callaghan, replying to Sherwood’s criticisms, calls them “baseless and extremely misleading,” and while acknowledging that the party had “undoubted shortcomings as an anti-imperialist force,” he argues that it actually had “its overworked tentacles in every likely field of colonial contacts.” The party was just “not very good at recruiting any section of the population in inter-war Britain.”⁶¹ Pointing to the amount of coverage given to colonial matters in the party press in the 1920s and 1930s, Callaghan’s argument is more persuasive. As I have argued elsewhere, small membership numbers and limited resources, along with poor timing, “constituted problems for the Party’s anti-colonial work” in the interwar period, despite the intentions of the CPGB’s activists.⁶²

COMINTERN INTERVENTIONS IN SOUTH AFRICA AND AUSTRALIA

Regarding South Africa, there was a feeling within the British and American communist parties, as well as the ECCI in Moscow, that the sectarianism of the Native Republic period had severely damaged the party.⁶³ Filatova and Davidson show that this period divided the CPSA almost irrevocably and severely damaged its ability to function: “by the middle of 1935, almost all day-to-day work in the Party had stopped. Its newspaper was neither distributed nor sold. The Party had only a few dozen members left – and its leadership still could not achieve consensus.”⁶⁴ Eventually the Native Republic Thesis was renounced and an anti-fascist alliance was encouraged between white and black workers. In its efforts to attract more Afrikaner workers towards the party and away from Nazi-tinged racism, the CPSA often ignored the black elements of the party. Allison Drew points to the name of the CPSA paper being changed from *Umsebenzi* to *The South African Worker* as evidence of this shift.⁶⁵

George Hardy, a Canadian-British communist, was sent by Moscow to oversee the redevelopment of the CPSA, in close communication with the CPGB. Hardy followed in the footsteps of other foreign Comintern representatives who had been sent to South Africa in the 1920s and 1930s. Douglas Wolton, one of the key proponents of the Native Republic Thesis, had been sent from the CPGB in the late 1920s, alongside Latvian communist Lazar Bach. Eugene Dennis, from the CPUSA, went in 1932. Similar representatives were sent to Australia at the same time, with Harry Wicks (also known as Herbert Moore) arriving in the country in 1930 to oversee the “Bolshevization” of the CPA.⁶⁶

In his memoirs, Hardy criticized the South African party for the “abstract way” that it had interpreted the Native Republic Thesis. It had “isolate[d] the Communists from wide sections of the people.”⁶⁷ The policy had ignored, Hardy argued, “the immediate problems facing the people: poverty and the danger of fascism and war.”⁶⁸ Under the tutelage of Hardy and the British party, the CPSA rebuilt itself, attempting to appeal to both black and white workers. In 1937, the CPSA wrote effusively about the inspiration that the CPGB provided for the party during this period: “It was only thanks to the assistance we received from the comrades from Britain that we were able to make a sharp turn in the direction the line ... and that we

were able to bring the Party down to reality ... and to build our Party from a narrow sect into a political Party.”⁶⁹

Some within the CPSA had some reservations about Hardy’s intervention on behalf of the Comintern. In an interview with Sonja Bunting, Moses Kotane stated that both Hardy and Russell seemed “all powerful by virtue of having been sent by a superior power.”⁷⁰ Kotane complained: “British Party men sent by c1. No more authority than I have. Coming from HQ people listened to them more than to others.”⁷¹

At a meeting of the Comintern’s Colonial Committee, Hardy stated that the fact that “the whole economy of South Africa is built on cheap, native labour” meant that it had to engage with a white working class that benefitted from this situation. Hardy said, “We must appeal to the people who have the Franchise in the country – we must make clear what their life would be like under Fascism.”⁷² Another CPGB member, Benjamin Bradley, commented on Hardy’s suggestions, quipping, “There is not enough stress on the appeal to the ‘poor whites’ for the simple reason that the Party has no policy for the poor whites.”⁷³ It remained that the CPSA, for all its flaws, was the only political organization that included both black and white members arguing for full equality for every South African citizen.

While the South African party fostered close ties with the British party, the Australian party felt that the CPGB as part of the Comintern’s Anglo-American Secretariat belittled its antipodean sister party. As Stuart Macintyre wrote, “officials of the CPA were prickly in the dealings with the Anglo-American Bureau ... and inclined to bridle at assumptions of superior wisdom, particularly from representatives of the CPGB.”⁷⁴ Bozinovski has shown that throughout the late 1920s and early 1930s, the CPA complained to the ECCI that Moscow overlooked the Australian party, and that, despite the Comintern often issuing directives to Australia via the CPGB and the Anglo-American Secretariat, the “British party had unilaterally relinquished responsibility for directing the tiny Australian party.”⁷⁵ While the relationship between the British and Australian parties was strained, Macintyre has also suggested that “the CPGB served as a convenient scapegoat for Australians’ frustrations” with Moscow and with the political situation that it found itself in.⁷⁶ The CPA petitioned the ECCI to be shifted from the remit of the Anglo-American Secretariat to the Eastern Secretariat, due to Australia’s proximity to Asia and its contested status as a British colony.⁷⁷ This request was denied by the ECCI.

THE CPA, NEW GUINEA, AND THE POPULAR FRONT

For the Communist Party of Australia, anti-colonial work during the interwar period was largely dedicated to ending Australian imperialism in New Guinea. Originally the CPA made no differentiation between British imperialism and the settler colonialism that existed in Australia. This contributed to an early silence on the colonial oppression experienced by the Indigenous peoples in Australia's mandated territories in the South Pacific, primarily in New Guinea. In dialogue with the Comintern, from the late 1920s the party developed a more nuanced theory of imperialism that highlighted the independent interests and initiative of the Australian bourgeoisie. In this context, the CPA started to campaign against Australian imperialism in New Guinea, highlighting the violent and exploitative rule by the Australians in the mandated territory. This provided an orientation that led to the development of important links between communist party members in northern Australia and the independence movement in the territories of New Guinea and Papua.

Australia's role in the protectorate featured predominantly in the CPA's literature during the Third Period. By the mid-to-late 1930s, however, coverage of the issue had diminished significantly. Most coverage of New Guinea related to warnings against German or Japanese imperialism there, as well as in other parts of Oceania. A 1937 pamphlet warned against Japanese colonialism in the region. L.C. Rodd wrote:

It is clear that the fate of the native peoples of New Guinea would be worse under Japanese imperialism than at present ...

The solution to the problem of the backward territories does not lie in the selfish exploitation of these regions by Australian or other capitalists. It lies in an honest trusteeship, a strict adherence to the policy stated in the League of Nations mandate.⁷⁸

In the lead-up to and throughout the Second World War, the CPA was relatively silent about New Guinea and self-determination for its people. Criticism of Australian imperialism was substituted for criticism of Japanese and German imperialism, and New Guinea was predominantly mentioned as a site for resisting the Axis powers. Like the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders who fought the Japanese during the war, the Papuans who helped the Australian army were

celebrated in the party press, often with the suggestion that their fight presaged a longer fight against imperialism and racism.

CONCLUSION

The outlook of the Communist parties in Britain, Australia, and South Africa changed again after the outbreak of the Second World War in September 1939, with the international communist movement thrown into disarray by the Non-Aggression Pact signed between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union in August, an event which marked a conspicuous shift in Soviet policy. When Britain and France declared war on Germany, the Soviets declared that the war was an “imperialist” war to maintain British and French colonial possessions.⁷⁹ Although originally supporting the war against Germany, individual communist parties followed the Soviet lead and, by October/November 1939, came to denounce the war as imperialist and pushed for “peace” between the European powers.⁸⁰

This opposition to the war reframed the anti-racist activism of the communist parties in all three countries, with the argument becoming that for non-white people, there was little difference between fascism and the imperialism of Britain and France, or particularly the discrimination faced by the native population in South Africa and Australia. After the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941, the international communist movement mobilized behind the Allied war effort, reviving the rhetoric of the Popular Front era. While accused by some of swapping the anti-imperial struggle for an alliance with the national bourgeoisie that aligned itself with the capitalist (and colonialist) great powers, the Communist parties of Great Britain, South Africa, and Australia emphatically supported the war effort after June 1941. This support for a “progressive” war effort stemmed from the Popular Front policies of the international communist movement since the mid-1930s, and the long tradition of anti-racism and anti-colonialism fostered by the international communist movement. Although these parties were some of the few political organizations to promote the struggle against racism during the interwar period, they were still subject to the changing directions from the Communist International and their focus changed several times from the early 1920s to the mid-1940s. For the communist parties in all three countries, the Second World War after June 1941 became the people’s war

against fascism, which they hoped would be turned into a war against capitalism and imperialism in the postwar era.

But soon after the war ended, serious disagreements between the Communist Party of Great Britain and the Communist Party of Australia arose; the CPA accused the CPGB of reformism after the British party started to propose a parliamentary road to socialism.⁸¹ Increasingly interested in China and the communist parties of South East Asia, the Australian party railed against the “Browderism” of the postwar CPGB.⁸² By contrast, the CPSA and the CPGB maintained a close relationship as pressure increased on the CPSA, until it was banned in 1950 by the new Malan government. While Moscow provided economic and military support to the underground South African Communist Party (SACP), the British party assisted communist exiles in London in establishing an organizational base in the early 1950s.⁸³

Historians of the Communist International and the international communist movement during the interwar period have, for a long time, seen the political programme of the movement as emanating out from Moscow to the peripheries. Some “revisionist” historians have countered this by showing that local communist parties, such as the CPGB, CPA, or the CPSA, somewhat resisted this “top-down” model and interpreted the Soviet directives in their own ways, according to local conditions. This chapter argues that these local initiatives cannot be seen in national isolation, but as part of an interconnected movement. At different times, both the South African and Australian parties vehemently disagreed with Moscow and resisted the Soviet Union’s interference in local affairs. As one of the leading parties of the Anglophone world, the CPGB often acted as an intermediary between the communist parties in the settler colonies and the Comintern’s ECCI. This led to close relationships in some circumstances, such as that between the CPGB and the CPSA; and it would lead to future disagreements, such as that between the CPGB and the CPA in the late 1940s.

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Race, the Comintern, and Communist Parties in British Dominions, 1920–1943

Oleksa Drachewych

As part of international communism's commitment to helping oppressed peoples worldwide, communists began to consider demands for racial equality. Linked with the national and colonial question, support for racial equality was first raised at the First Congress of the Comintern. There, Leon Trotsky and Dutch communist S.J. Rutgers mentioned the colonized peoples of the world, with explicit reference to their races. Lenin further advanced racial equality as one of the many theses in the Comintern's Theses on the National and Colonial Question. As more parties throughout the world joined the Comintern, the Comintern and international communism began to take the issue of racial equality (and especially the "Negro" question) seriously.¹

Throughout the 1920s black communists flocked to Moscow, especially from the United States. Their issues were given some prominence in the tactics of international communism. By the Third Period, the Comintern was urging parties throughout the world to consider racial issues, especially when they concerned immigrant workers and the Negro question. The Comintern also created new organizations, such as the International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers (ITUCNW), a subsection of the Red International of Labor Unions, aimed at uniting the black Atlantic. Despite this generally consistent support for ideas of racial equality, especially for black African workers, the Comintern tended to prioritize certain areas and groups and pay less attention to others, completely neglecting to consider the racial dimension of some particular struggles.²

To demonstrate some of these inconsistencies, a comparative analysis of international communism's efforts during the interwar period

in some British Dominions – namely South Africa, Australia, New Zealand, and Canada – can help illuminate which parties experienced more Comintern guidance on racial issues, the nature of what the Comintern suggested, and which parties were left to their own devices to develop plans for certain racialized groups in their region. These four British Dominions offer an appropriate basis for comparison on these issues, as they had significant Indigenous and foreign worker populations and a Comintern-directed need to consider imperialism and colonialism regarding their respective countries. What is made clear in this analysis is that the Comintern placed greater emphasis on black African issues, evident in its intervention in the Communist Party of South Africa. Otherwise, there appeared to be little consistency in how the Comintern tackled race. It urged parties to help immigrant workers, and to apply to colonized peoples the framework of the self-determination of nations. Whereas South Africa received significant attention from the Comintern, only New Zealand received orders from the Comintern to consider Indigenous peoples – and, even then, the party only referenced racial issues in relation to Nazi policies and international politics. The Communist Party of Australia received guidance from the Comintern regarding its position on the White Australia policy, but, along with the Canadian party, it was given little assistance on Indigenous peoples. As a result, it is difficult to claim that the Comintern had a clear platform regarding race. Even though it regarded the self-determination of nations as a legitimate framework for dealing with the Negro question and colonized peoples generally, the Comintern did not generalize the Native Republic Thesis that was displayed in South Africa. The Comintern applied its own tactics inconsistently, and in some cases, the communist parties themselves had to develop their own platform, which did not always take racial considerations into account.

OVERVIEW OF THE RACE QUESTION

Prior to the Bolshevik Revolution, race was a topic only occasionally referenced in the writings of Lenin. One notable example was a short piece written in 1913, published later in 1923, comparing the end of serfdom in Russia to American slavery. In it, Lenin noted the oddity of comparing a race to a nation, but otherwise used the comparison to suggest that former Russian serfs, at least if one looked at literacy rates, were still worse off in 1913 than most African Americans. Capitalism would resist the complete emancipation of slaves or serfs.³

Early Congresses of the Comintern barely covered race, and, when they did, it was in general terms. At the First Congress, mentions of colonial troops, and in particular their barbarism, smacked of traditional imperialist racial mindsets; some communists, such as S.J. Rutgers, urged the removal of such language.⁴ Trotsky referred to the different races of the world, explicitly noting that the Communist International would stand with them and fight against their oppression.⁵ Race was not necessarily a defining issue on which delegates dwelled. Instead, a traditional Marxist position was typically employed; racism was a tool of the bourgeoisie to ensure oppression, but by focusing on the greater class struggle, downplaying racial differences, and combating all oppression, communist revolution was possible with the Comintern at the vanguard.

The Second Comintern Congress continued the generally vague references to race but in ways that would be much more consequential. More notable among them was Lenin's reference to African Americans in the Theses on the National and Colonial Question. In Clause 9 of the Theses, it was stated that "all Communist parties must directly support the revolutionary movement among the nations that are dependent and do not have equal rights (for example Ireland, the Negroes in America, and so forth), and in the colonies."⁶ The Theses defined African Americans as a nation and an oppressed people in the United States, with little explanation for how nationhood and race were one and the same.

Among the US delegates, John Reed, who spoke first at Lenin's urging, focused entirely on African Americans. He quickly summarized the history of African Americans, noting the differences between their oppression in Northern states and Southern states. He observed that the previous socialist parties in America had had no intention of including them. Meanwhile, African Americans had gradually become more racially conscious and they needed to be considered in a broader communist context. Reed noted that other relevant movements, like Marcus Garvey's Back to Africa movement and the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), had failed. "Negroes have no demands for national independence," remarked Reed, and "they consider themselves first of all Americans at home in the United States." For Reed, this meant that the best tactic regarding African Americans was to treat them like workers, oppressed by class; African Americans in the South dealt with problems similar to those of white farmers. Reed promoted a traditional Marxist approach, downplaying racial differences and focusing on workers' unity, a stance that would

undermine racism and nurture a united proletariat.⁷ Louis Fraina of the Communist Party of America followed, reminding delegates that the United States as an imperial power also oppressed foreign workers in Latin America and South America, minimizing the uniqueness of the racial oppression suffered by African Americans. He specifically noted that appealing to African Americans or foreign workers would not lead to a socialist revolution in the United States. Instead, a general workers' movement was necessary.⁸ Other delegates, such as John Murphy, discussed South Africa and India, and disregarded race altogether. Delegates from the Far East focused on their oppression as colonized peoples and did not emphasize any racial elements. Generally speaking, race remained something that was barely mentioned. Even when it was, it was secondary to proletarian unity.⁹

By the Third Comintern Congress, some communists saw a need to deal properly with racially oppressed groups. South African representatives Sam Barlin and David Ivon Jones made the first significant declaration regarding race. Jones delivered a speech that began by noting that he had been requested to do so, before he referenced how late in the Congress he was speaking: "the fact that we are dealing with this vast question in the closing hours of this congress is no indication of our sense of responsibility."¹⁰ Jones called for more attention to black issues, citing the racial makeup of South Africa and the United States, but also included an appeal to consider race generally. He referred particularly to India's racial makeup and the potential for white workers to work alongside Indian workers in India's struggle for independence. He continued exalting the potential of the black population in Africa, suggesting that "they are ripe for communism" and calling for a statement of "solidarity" with the black African population.¹¹

The following year, at the Fourth Comintern Congress, Otto Huiswood and Claude McKay, both members of the African Blood Brotherhood (ABB), attended and built on Jones's calls. The ABB, formed in 1919 and led by Cyril Briggs, represented a counter-movement to that of Marcus Garvey and the UNIA. Briggs and the ABB called for an Africa freed from European domination and linked the struggle against colonialism with the struggle against racism. The ABB was also greatly influenced by black Caribbeans, who sought to free Latin America from American and European influence. The pro-communist ABB's solution was self-determination for African Americans as a response to the Negro question. Between 1919 and

1921, the ABB, strongly influenced by the ideals and politics of the United Front, began to consider racial issues with reference to class. Much of its leadership joined the Communist Party of America, won over by its general anti-imperialism, if not by its as yet very limited engagement with race.¹²

McKay and Huiswood discussed tactics as they highlighted blacks' general mistrust of whites. The Theses on the Negro Question presented at the Fourth Congress highlighted African Americans as the international leaders of the African peoples. As a result, McKay and Huiswood's tactics, while listing other areas of the black Atlantic, placed an overwhelming focus on American issues. They termed the African American population the "vanguard of the struggle against oppression in Africa" and noted that capitalism and imperialism oppressed the black population in much the same way it did colonized peoples and the working classes. The Theses placed racial oppression on the same plane as class-based oppression, and demanded equality for all, especially in the realm of political, social, and labour rights.¹³

The Comintern also started to promote, albeit very generally, a defense of foreign and migrant workers. The Fourth Comintern Congress, citing the "inevitability" of a world war in the Pacific, urged communist parties of nations bordering the Pacific to "eliminate the factors that disorganize the workers' movement."¹⁴ One factor explicitly mentioned was the use of racialized immigrant workers. It called on communists to demand an end to xenophobic immigration legislation, the repeal of race-based labour laws, the admission of foreign workers into trade unions, and equal wages regardless of race. The Comintern firmly rejected racism and called for clear steps to show immigrants and racial minorities "that the international proletariat [did] not harbour any racial prejudice."¹⁵

Communists from British dominions were aware of the importance of dealing with racial issues and foreign labour. In the earliest sessions of the Anglo-American Colonial Group, and later the Anglo-American Secretariat, delegates, including representatives of the Communist Parties of South Africa (CPSA), Canada (CPC), and Australia (CPA), discussed methods to deal with race. These meetings revealed early positions and impending divisions. For example, Sidney Bunting, who would become the CPSA's party chairman in December 1924, called for workers' unity broadly through the cooperation of white and black workers.¹⁶ Over the course of 1922 and into 1923, the Anglo-American Secretariat debated the merits of a Negro Congress. It

focused on the need to develop proper tactics to integrate the concerns of blacks into the revolutionary movement. David Ivon Jones, while favouring a greater focus on black issues, shifted from a general support of the overall stance – a necessity in its context – to hesitation about its practical consequences. He noted that communists strove to undermine racial divisions, in favour of class-based unity. He emphasized the lack of an adequate apparatus to spread the message and prepare for such a Congress.¹⁷

Sen Katayama, member of the Communist Party of Japan, was one of the early champions of the Negro question. He remained committed in his support for a Negro Congress. He echoed the aforementioned phrase from Lenin's Theses on the National and Colonial Question at the Second Congress, reminding others that African Americans were "a subject nation," similar to Ireland.¹⁸ Jones, responding to Katayama, replied that the Negro question differed from the Chinese or Indian questions:

As an abstract race question we are trying to do something quite new in the present proposal. This is not on a par with the Chinese question or the Indian question. The Chinese question is not a race question. The Indian question is not a race question. These are national questions. This is a question who shall rule India, the Indian people or the British Imperialists; who shall rule Chinese, the Chinese or the International Capitalists. The issue of this question is a vital factor in the revolution. But the negro race question has no such basis. The negroes everywhere find themselves more or less intermixed with white populations, and are drawn into the white class movements on one side or the other. The Negro race question is of doubtful revolutionary value, and can be of distinct [sic] counterrevolutionary effect like Zionism. "Back to Africa" is the racial slogan used in America to divert the Negroes from their class interests ... Race solidarity is used for counter-revolutionary purposes among the Negroes, and differs radically from Indian, Chinese, Egyptian, Korean National solidarity against Imperialism.¹⁹

Jones defined the Chinese or Indian questions as national ones, not racial ones. Blacks in the US had to deal with assimilation into white populations and movements. He also suggested that racial solidarity had counterrevolutionary potential, highlighting its use by Marcus

Garvey and others, because it intensified black antagonism towards white workers.²⁰ Delegates debated the difficult questions surrounding the general tactics of the movement and the particulars confronting individual parties.²¹

While the Secretariat tackled the Negro question, it also focused on immigration. The Australian and Canadian governments championed restrictive immigration measures. They often demonized immigrant workers as cheap labour, thereby intensifying xenophobia and racism. Bill Earsman of the CPA and others noted that trade unions tended to be against these measures and promoted a general commitment to fight capitalism, which drew so freely on racialized labour.

These discussions exposed more disagreement. Sidney Bunting continued to call for a focus on class unity at the expense of race in general. He wanted cheap labour and general labour rights to figure prominently in any rhetoric. To those who wanted to deal with the issues of coloured labour, the two sides were split over how to move forward. Some wanted to downplay racial division and race as the leading themes of future agitation. Others, for whom race was a defining feature of oppression, wanted to win over racialized workers with a full acknowledgement of their subaltern position. Ultimately, many of these early debates led to the same conclusion: communists required tactics that were well considered, appropriate, and internationalist. Many communists wanted to avoid opening Pandora's box by taking the wrong approach.²²

As delegates in the Anglo-American Secretariat disagreed on tactics, the Comintern's tactics on the Negro question developed due to the efforts of black communists in Moscow. These communists were personally motivated to deal with the issue and gained enough influence within the Comintern apparatus to win a hearing for their views. Following the Fourth Comintern Congress, the Comintern created a Negro Commission. The Negro Commission allowed for some discussion of black issues, but with a predominantly American focus.²³ Black communists championed such efforts. The American Negro Labour Congress (ANLC) was held in Chicago in 1925. The ANLC promoted the same line as the one promoted at the Fourth Congress, and brought important black activists, such as James Ford and George Padmore, into the Comintern's orbit.²⁴

Tactics regarding the Negro question changed gradually over the 1920s. Some communists began to feel that the application of the policy of self-determination promised a solution to the Negro

question. African American communist Harry Haywood was one of the strongest adherents of this approach. He had been convinced of its merits by Nikolai Nasanov, a Russian member of the Young Communist International in Chicago. According to Haywood's memoirs, these ideas had floated around Russia for some time. Katayama continued to highlight Lenin's views on African Americans to black students at the Communist University of the Toilers of the East (KUTV). Haywood intimated, drawing on strictly anecdotal evidence, that Grigory Zinoviev and Joseph Stalin had on other occasions agreed with Lenin. He started to reconsider these positions in discussions with Nasanov. Nasanov convinced Haywood that the American Civil War and Reconstruction together had constituted a failed democratic revolution. Black Americans were an oppressed nation, equivalent to a colonized people, and their liberation would complete this revolution and lead to its communist successor. What of the nationhood of African Americans? Nasanov proposed a thesis that ascribed the socio-economic backwardness of the African Americans to the failed mid-nineteenth century revolutions. Even if they only partially fit Stalin's criteria for nations, black Americans' shared language, history, and socio-economic development were sufficient to make them one. Their struggle for equality required a struggle for national liberation.²⁵

Together, Nasanov and Haywood drafted and presented a set of theses to the Negro Commission of the Anglo-American Secretariat in August 1928, as the Sixth Comintern Congress was underway. The Haywood-Nasanov Theses promoted what essentially amounted to self-determination on racial lines in the American context. Other Negro Commission members were slow to come around, until Max Petrovsky, the commission's chairman, intervened. He cited, yet again, Lenin's description of African Americans as subject peoples in the Theses on the National and Colonial Question. The reference to Lenin quashed any debate and the committee forwarded the Haywood-Nasanov Theses to the Negro Commission of the Sixth Comintern Congress. Soon they influenced the new tactics in the American context.²⁶

The discussion of self-determination on racial lines was not exclusive to the situation in the United States. Comintern officials had begun considering a similar line a year earlier for South Africa. When CPSA member and Coloured trade unionist James La Guma came to Moscow in March 1927, he offered a harsh evaluation of the South African racial and labour situation about which Comintern officials had been

woefully kept in the dark.²⁷ In the subsequent discussion, one proposal that came up repeatedly was an independent native republic – that is, extending the right of national self-determination to give the black African population of South Africa independence from British or Afrikaan imperialism.²⁸ By the summer, a “Native Republic Thesis” had become the suggested approach for the CPSA.²⁹ By the end of the Sixth Comintern Congress, the Comintern forced the CPSA to adopt it.³⁰

Thus the Negro question generated new, more radical “answers” in the shape of the new lines on race in the United States and South Africa. Did the Comintern consider extending this line to other racialized minorities such as Indigenous peoples? There is evidence showing that some parts of the Comintern bureaucracy did, for example, in South America. Generally, however, the Comintern seemed to have no specific plan for other racial groups.³¹ Foreign workers, although referred to generally, were never given concrete guidance outside of a recommendation that they assimilate into the broader labour movement. Similarly, looking through an international lens, the Comintern made no attempt to adopt a general tactic for Indigenous people analogous to these new lines on black Americans and Africans.³² At most, as will be seen, particular parties were given specific suggestions by the Comintern. Often these parties needed to develop their own platforms or tactics, or appropriate Comintern tactics from elsewhere, to determine their approach. Most generally, the Comintern had a tendency to view colonized peoples as oppressed nationalities; race was brought up in specific contexts, namely the black Atlantic. In other contexts, such as the Pacific, racialized minorities were viewed as colonized peoples, with little to no consideration of their racial oppression.

SOUTH AFRICA

South Africa, as noted above, was prioritized within discussions on the Negro question, and among the British Dominions it garnered the most Comintern attention. South Africa rose in importance following James La Guma’s visit in March 1927. Before then, the CPSA and its tactics barely registered in Comintern affairs. So what was the CPSA doing before 1927?

The CPSA began as a party that sought to promote worker unity across racial divides. William Andrews, the CPSA’s first party chairman, was a trade unionist who wanted to build on his influence in

those circles; as a result, the party gravitated primarily to promoting the labour rights of white workers. Black African workers and other racial groups were not necessarily ignored, but they were not prioritized. The CPSA struggled with trying to represent all workers, while expanding its base.³³ The Rand Revolt of 1922, in which white mining workers rebelled against the government and the removal of certain race-based benefits enjoyed by white workers, exposed the party's precarious position in South African politics. Despite the CPSA calling for unity of all workers and downplaying racial violence and racist rhetoric, white workers used a slogan – “Workers of the World, Fight and Unite for a White South Africa” – that was a distorted echo of the Communist International’s. Government and police officials pinned the blame for the revolt on the Communist Party of South Africa, despite its attempts to be a mediating force.³⁴ The party attempted to rebound from these embarrassments by engaging in United Front tactics and promoting a partnership with the South African Labour Party.³⁵

The partnership never amounted to anything but another tactical misfire. The South African Labour Party joined with the South African National Party to form the Pact government after the general election of 1924. In the following years, the Pact government passed a series of laws to protect white workers and reinforce the colour bar.³⁶ By the end of December 1924, younger members of the party, along with a group of South African communists led by Sidney Bunting, urged the party to focus more on the needs of black African workers.³⁷ Such a stance did not mean anything like the subsequent Native Republic line. Bunting felt that by tackling class issues generally and uniting all workers, racial inequality and other related issues would disappear. He also disagreed with calling South Africa a colony and black Africans colonized peoples, partially because he was persuaded of the black South Africans’ supposed disinclination to support nationalism.³⁸ Between the beginning of 1925 and the summer of 1928, when the Comintern’s Sixth Congress opened, the party briefly collaborated with the Industrial Coloured Union (ICU), before forging a much more fruitful, though similarly brief, partnership with the African National Congress (ANC). The CPSA also promoted literacy campaigns among black African workers and defended African workers in legal proceedings related to strikes and labour issues. By the summer of 1928, the black African membership of the party had ballooned, accounting for a significant percentage of its makeup. In the process,

however, many white workers, disinclined to support black African rights while protecting their own, moved away from the party.³⁹

By the late 1920s, Bunting's general ambivalence with respect to South Africa's colonial situation and his classical Marxist approach to race and labour had led to some success for the CPSA. La Guma's visit and the resulting Native Republic Thesis started to put pressure on the CPSA to shift to a focus on black Africans as oppressed, colonized peoples and the promotion of their national self-determination. Max Petrovsky, pivotal in this shift in both the American and South African contexts, clashed with Sidney Bunting at the Sixth Comintern Congress's Negro Commission. There, Bunting's views found no audience, and by the end, the CPSA was forced to agree to the new line.⁴⁰ Even in the resolution on the South African question, the ECCI attacked the CPSA for its "stubbornness" and created a new slogan urging "an independent native South African republic as a stage towards a workers' and peasants' republic with full, equal rights for all races." As in the American context, South African communists were urged to complete the bourgeois revolution by focusing on the revolutionary potential of the black African population. Bunting and other critics of the slogan suggested that white workers would turn against the party and perceive the new slogan as an attack on them. Furthermore, they claimed that it neglected realities on the ground, including the lack of a black African bourgeoisie. It might almost be likened to Garveyism. These criticisms, denounced as proceeding from "the unwillingness to accept the correct principle that South Africa belongs to the native population," were ignored.⁴¹

Bunting and the CPSA leadership attempted to adapt the Native Republic Thesis to their way of thinking, trying to alter its meaning in carefully crafted statements, while also grappling with its vagueness.⁴² At the Sixth Congress, Bunting tried, to no avail, to downplay the new line's racial politics. He tried to change the wording of the slogan to "An Independent Workers' and Peasants' South African Republic with equal rights for all toilers irrespective of colour, as a basis for a native government."⁴³ At its Seventh Congress, the CPSA, while ostensibly accepting the new line, struggled to maintain the old slogan promoting equality for all. The party sought to minimize racial distinctions, and especially the ideal of black African control, to avoid further alienating white workers.⁴⁴

As part of this approach, Bunting started a League for African Rights (LAR), concerned with the spectre of the party's potential

illegalization. The LAR, however, also partnered with many non-communists, including leaders of the ANC, which under Comintern Third Period tactics was not permitted.⁴⁵ These actions led many original supporters of the Native Republic Thesis and the ECCI to see Bunting and the CPSA as reluctant and unreliable supporters of the new line. The Comintern dispatched British-born South African communist Douglas Wolton, with specific instructions to denounce Bunting, along with Latvian communist Lazar Bach, to ensure the proper implementation of the Native Republic Thesis. This Comintern intervention led to key CPSA members being expelled. Many others, either feeling the new platform was too radical or acting out of loyalty to Bunting, left on their own accord. Black African members did enter the leadership in unprecedented numbers and some gathered at the Lenin School in Moscow.⁴⁶

The Comintern jettisoned its support for the Native Republic Thesis in South Africa in 1935, and by the start of the Second World War, the CPSA was able to take the anti-colonial aspects of the thesis and merge them with its general calls for racial equality and worker unity. Especially following the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union, the CPSA highlighted the evils of Nazi Germany by focusing on its racial policies and noting that all of the racialized groups in South Africa, especially black Africans and Coloured and Asian workers, would be harmed by a German invasion. The Native Republic Thesis, connected in its polarizing thrust with the Third Period, fell with the Popular Front. By the 1940s, the party's overwhelming emphasis was on the defense of the Soviet Union.⁴⁷

AUSTRALIA

Whereas race was necessarily a core issue for the CPSA, in Australia, it should have been but was not. The White Australia policy was in place in Australia and was coupled with the preference of British settlers as immigrants.⁴⁸ There was also a significant number of Southern Europeans who had come to Australia for work. The newly formed CPA, although well versed on the policy, had no plan to deal with it.

The impetus for the CPA to reconsider its position on the White Australia Policy came from the Comintern. On multiple occasions, the Comintern called on the CPA to struggle more strenuously against the policy. The CPA initially engaged in some discussion about how

best to do so. Was it better to promote the integration of all workers into one movement, or to call for an end to the immigration of cheap labour?⁴⁹ With the onset of the Third Period, the CPA became surer of its plans. Old leaders were forced completely out of the party; Herbert Moxon, Lawrence Sharkey, and J.B. Miles took their place. At this point, the party was able to argue firmly against the White Australia policy, and, agitating against cheap labour, called for all foreign workers to be integrated into trade unions.⁵⁰

Notwithstanding a few fleeting references, the CPA neglected Aboriginal peoples until the Third Period. A CPA platform for Aboriginal peoples did not appear until Herbert Moxon's "Communist Party's Fight for Aborigines" in *Workers' Weekly* in September 1931. The article, fully integrating Comintern analysis of Australia's position in the world as an imperialist state, tied the poor treatment of Aboriginal peoples to Australian imperialism. The article noted that Aboriginal peoples were the target of "exterminationalist" policies and lacked political and legal rights. It also translated the Native Republic Thesis from the black African context to an Aboriginal one. It demanded an independent Aboriginal territory in northern and northwest Australia.⁵¹ This article was the start of what became a significant campaign in CPA party organs publicizing the oppression of Aboriginal peoples. Many stories offered evidence in the party press that seemed to show that Australian judges were prejudiced against Aboriginal peoples.⁵²

The mid-1930s saw less attention given to Aboriginal issues. In 1939, CPA member Tom Wright intervened in the largely quiescent question with *A New Deal for the Aborigines*. Responding to growing attention to Aboriginal issues by the Australian government, this pamphlet, republished on multiple occasions, became the backbone of the party's position on Aboriginal rights through the Second World War and beyond. It differentiated between full-blooded Aboriginals and mixed-blood Aboriginals, suggesting different tactics for each. Mixed blood Aboriginals were to be assimilated into Australian society, whereas full-blooded Aboriginals would receive inviolable reserves, secular support services, and an end to state-by-state methods of dealing with them.⁵³

As the party came to pay more attention to Aboriginal peoples, it also considered the rights of Pacific Islanders, especially those in New Guinea and in Queensland. New Guinea was a useful example for the CPA as it clearly demonstrated Australia's imperial nature.⁵⁴ As

the party started to consider Aboriginal peoples in the early 1930s, it did the same for Melanesian workers. With the onset of the Second World War, and the Japanese invasion of New Guinea, the living conditions of Melanesian workers came under scrutiny by the CPA, and the CPA promoted a “new deal” for them, encompassing better health care, education, and wages. The party pressed the Curtin government, which it supported, to improve the living conditions of New Guineans. Employing civilizing mission rhetoric, such articles argued that government oversight would avert corporate exploitation, and government control of shops would prevent Pacific Islanders purchasing liquor with their new, fairly-determined wages.⁵⁵ Other articles pointed out a need to maintain the culture of Pacific Islanders and to resist particularly “imperialist” ways of teaching them modern methods of agriculture.⁵⁶ Their involvement in the Australian war effort was used an example of how Aboriginal and Melanesian peoples could become equal citizens in Australia. By the end of the Second World War, the CPA had made equal rights for Aboriginal and Melanesian peoples a prominent feature of its platform.

NEW ZEALAND

The Communist Party of New Zealand (CPNZ) officially formed as its own separate party in 1927, having previously been a subsection of, and represented by, the CPA.⁵⁷ Almost immediately after its formation, the Comintern urged the CPNZ to consider matters involving the Maori and Samoan peoples. The Comintern had some awareness of the importance of these issues earlier in the 1920s. When Australian communist Hector Ross spoke to the Anglo-American Secretariat in 1925, he was asked about the situation amongst the Maori, along with Australian Aboriginals. He gave a general, half-baked response. After 1927, the CPNZ was enjoined to take up this struggle of Indigenous peoples. Its approach to this question required coming up with a method to reach the Maori and the Samoan peoples in the New Zealand mandate of Samoa. In October 1928, the Executive Committee of the Communist International forwarded its “Resolution on the Tasks of the Communist Party of New Zealand” to the nascent party. The resolution chastised the party’s “complete failure to understand the importance of Samoa or the colonial question.” The CPNZ needed to reach the exploited Maori and Samoan populations with a strong commitment to “link

up with the Mau movement of revolt in Samoa, [and to] endeavour to arouse sympathy for the Mau movement among the Maoris.”⁵⁸ The Comintern resolution did not consider race. It interpreted the Maori and Samoan peoples as colonized peoples; they fell, in short, under the terms of the Theses on the National and Colonial Questions. Samoan and Maori movements for self-determination were placed within the general struggle against imperialism. Furthermore, the party was urged to bring Samoan and Maori representatives into the party and into sections of the League against Imperialism.⁵⁹ In the same resolution, the Comintern also called on the CPNZ to demand free migration, regardless of race. This section was the only point in the entire resolution where race was explicitly mentioned.⁶⁰

The CPNZ, however, failed to adequately respond to the Comintern’s desires when it came to Maori and Samoan issues. In March 1930, the Polit-Secretariat of the ECCI criticized the party for failing to attract any Maori membership. Here was another example of the party’s complete lack of attention to or ability to reach the Maori peoples. It urged the CPNZ to look closely at issues important to the Maori and to promote demands of self-determination for both the Maori and the Samoans, while also winning over the general New Zealand proletariat to this struggle. Surprisingly enough, given the Third Period context, the Polit-Secretariat also called on the CPNZ to work with “non-Party sympathizers and representatives of the Mau” who were struggling for Samoan independence – a struggle punctuated in 1929 by armed violence on the part of the New Zealand military police.⁶¹

By November 1934, the CPNZ had still not adequately dealt with such issues. Familiar injunctions from Moscow regarding the Maori were repeated. With regard to the Mau movement, the Comintern instructed the CPNZ that the movement’s then-imprisoned leader, Olaf Frederick Nelson, should be supported in his quest for freedom, but, as a nationalist, he should not be considered an ally of the Samoan peoples. Rather, the party should assume leadership of the movement. These issues were to be included in the party’s 1935 federal election platform.⁶² In June 1935, the Anglo-American Secretariat sent amissive to the party specifically concerning Samoan independence. It declared the CPNZ’s support for “self-determination even to the point of state separation,” thus pre-determining the New Zealand party’s stance. It gave support to the Mau movement’s call for “Samoa for the Samoans,” and called on the CPNZ and the CPUSA to unite the

independence movements in West and East Samoa respectively. Yet again, gaining Maori support for the Mau movement was another priority. For the first time, race was explicitly mentioned. Taking advantage of fears of the presumed Nazi desire to secure colonies, the resolution declared that if Samoa were taken over by the Nazis, Samoan peoples would be deemed “one of the lower races” and “subjected to unheard of oppression and exploitation.”⁶³

Notwithstanding the Comintern’s emphatic critique, the party still dealt with such matters inconsistently. Historian Kerry Taylor argues that the Comintern’s pleas ignored local conditions. In his article detailing the party’s platforms regarding the Maori, he points out that the CPNZ largely focused on educating workers about the oppression of the Maori in two specific periods: 1935–36 and 1942–46. In the first period, highlighted by a series of articles in *Worker’s Weekly* and following the Australian precedent, the CPNZ focused on the treatment of Maori people and their poor living conditions. The CPNZ did take into consideration the Comintern’s suggestions for its 1935 election platform, but all pamphlets on the subject of the Maori came out after the election, blunting their electoral impact. Despite such early failings, from 1935–36, the party took significant steps to promote Maori rights.⁶⁴

CANADA

Whereas the CPNZ received instructions from the Comintern to consider Maori and Samoan peoples, such direction with respect to a racialized minority was generally lacking in the case of the Communist Party of Canada (CPC). The Comintern was more concerned about the CPC’s need to improve its standing amongst native-born workers, namely English and French speakers.⁶⁵ In the Comintern’s instructions and advice to the party, Indigenous peoples were not mentioned at all, and African Canadians only rarely. Instead, the CPC seemed to take its lead from the narrative established by the Comintern at the Sixth Comintern Congress. There, in its Theses on the Revolutionary Movement in the Colonies and Semicolonies, and with specific reference to Australia and Canada, the Comintern noted that upon the arrival of European settlers, Indigenous peoples had been “for the most part exterminated.”⁶⁶ Though the Australian party seemed to move on from this inaccurate and dated representation, the Canadian party clung to the same narrative, as we learn from one of its Dominion School education documents.⁶⁷

The CPC maintained this general ignorance towards Indigenous peoples in Canada until 1937. At its Eighth Party Convention, the party finally delineated a position on the matter. The CPC offered up a tepid condemnation of the reserve system in Canada and urged a need to extend equal rights to Indigenous peoples while demanding “greater … social assistance.” The CPC did not call for the self-determination of Indigenous nations.⁶⁸ Notably, in its instructions to the CPC outlining necessary platforms for the party to develop at its convention, the Comintern did not mention Indigenous peoples at all, suggesting that Canadian communists had been the ones pushing the issue.⁶⁹ The CPC did little other evident work on Indigenous peoples until 1943, when it offered its support to the Métis population.⁷⁰ It would not be until after the Second World War that Indigenous peoples were given any significant attention by the CPC.

Foreign workers showed up more on the CPC’s radar. Ukrainian, Finnish, and Jewish populations made up much of the party’s membership. Foreign-born workers, uniquely vulnerable to deportation, were strenuously defended by the party and its front groups.⁷¹ With respect to Asian Canadians, the CPC counselled their integration into local trade unions.⁷² Yet, for a brief period following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, the party refrained from courting Japanese workers and instead played into the xenophobia of the time. Historian Werner Cohn notes that this shift to direct racial chauvinism was brief and atypical of Canadian communism during this period.⁷³ That said, the lapse was surely telling: the CPC’s efforts to understand and fight racism were, at best, marginal and episodic.

CONCLUSION

The Comintern had no fixed plan or line on race that it extended to all parties. Instead, at most, a general commitment to equal rights and racial equality existed within international communism. This emphasis can be traced back to its foundational preoccupation with the self-determination of nations. Discussions of race in the Negro Commission, and in the Theses on the National and Colonial Question, were plainly linked to the campaign against colonialism. The Comintern’s interventions and counsels were inconsistent. The Comintern had its priorities. South Africa became an important battleground for the Comintern’s platforms on the Negro question, second only to the United States. For the other Dominions, the Comintern placed emphasis on the plight of foreign workers. In New Zealand,

it also emphasized aiding the Maori and Samoans. Comintern influence in Australia seemed confined to the White Australia Policy. In Canada, down to the mild intervention of 1937, the CPC provided no guidance whatsoever regarding Indigenous peoples.

These inconsistencies in the Comintern's approach suggest several conclusions about international communism. The first is that, outside of specific platforms, such as the Native Republic Thesis, the Comintern had no firm approach to race. Lines implemented in one place were not automatically transposed to another. Nor did it do much rigorous work to follow the parties' progress on race issues. The second conclusion is more critical for Comintern studies. Individual communist parties had some room in which to operate, and, in some cases, were obliged to develop their own tactics based on their own understandings of local conditions. The Comintern certainly played some role in offering advice and in turning some parties' attention to racial issues, as in the cases of the Comintern's efforts to get the CPA to focus on foreign workers, to convince the CPNZ to consider Maori and Samoan peoples, and to force the CPSA to change its approach to black African workers. Yet, as the CPNZ case suggests, and as Comintern silence about Indigenous peoples in Canada confirms, the Comintern was often of little to no help as a guide, let alone as an instructor. The CPC did not consider Indigenous peoples an important matter until late in the interwar period, and again, it received no help in doing so from the Comintern. However striking and consequentially communists in the twentieth century contested racial hierarchies, the Comintern itself offered inconsistent guidance at best when it came to such issues. At worst it offered nothing. This left such communists very much outside the real, effective control of the Comintern in Moscow.

NOTES

- 1 As noted in the introduction to this collection, although the use of the term "Negro" is no longer considered appropriate today, for clarity, I have elected to maintain the use of the historical term used by communists at that time in this chapter.
- 2 Oleksa Drachewych, *The Communist International, Anti-Imperialism and Racial Equality in British Dominions* (London: Routledge, 2018).

- 3 V.I. Lenin, “Russkie i negry,” in *Polnoe Sobranie Sochinenii (PSS)* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel’stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1961), 22:345–6.
- 4 John Riddell, ed., *Founding the Communist International: Proceedings and Documents of the First Congress: March 1919* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1987), 188.
- 5 Riddell, *Founding the Communist International*, 317.
- 6 John Riddell, ed., *Workers of the World and Oppressed Peoples, Unite!: Proceedings and Documents of the Second Congress, 1920* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1991), 364.
- 7 Ibid., 1:287–92.
- 8 Ibid., 1:292–4.
- 9 Ibid., 1:294–360.
- 10 John Riddell, ed., *To the Masses: Proceedings of the Third Congress of the Communist International, 1921* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2015), 1193.
- 11 Riddell, *To the Masses*, 1193–6.
- 12 Jacob Zumoff, *The Communist International and US Communism 1919–1929* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2015), 298–303.
- 13 Riddell, *Toward the United Front*, 947–51.
- 14 Ibid., 1189.
- 15 Ibid., 1188–9. Despite the promising calls, communism struggled with this issue. Stuart Macintyre notes that the Communist Party of Australia needed to instruct workers that racist slurs were unacceptable. Stuart Macintyre, *The Reds* (St Leonard’s: Allen and Unwin, 1998), 267–8. Hakim Adi also details how James Ford struggled with race-based discrimination while running the ITUCNW. Adi, *Pan-Africanism and Communism: The Communist International, Africa and the Diaspora, 1919–1939* (Trenton: Africa World Press, 2013), 124–36.
- 16 Library and Archives Canada (LAC), Communist International fonds, MG 10-K3, R14860-0-3-E, reel K-269, 495.72.1, 85.
- 17 LAC, R14860-0-3-E, K-269, 495.72.2, 87–8; LAC, R14860-0-3-E, K-269, 495.72.2, 135–48; Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv sotsial’no-politicheskoi istorii (RGASPI), f. 495, op. 155, d. 3, ll. 1–17.
- 18 Katayama’s statement also heavily castigated the American Communist Party’s general ambivalence towards the Negro question. RGASPI, 495.155.17, 9–12; Karl Radek followed up on Katayama’s criticism but also referenced the aforementioned section of the Theses on the National and Colonial Question. RGASPI, 495.155.17, 13–23

- 19 RGASPI, 495.155.3, 9.
- 20 Ibid.
- 21 LAC, R14860-0-3-E, K-269, 495.72.2, 135–48.
- 22 LAC, R14860-0-3-E, K-269, 495.72.2, 116–17; LAC, R14860-0-3-E, K-269, 495.72.2, 148–9.
- 23 Adi, *Pan-Africanism and Communism*, 29–35.
- 24 Zumoff, *US Communism*, 318–29; Adi, *Pan-Africanism and Communism*, 29–35.
- 25 Haywood also noted that Lenin suggested that the Civil War was a failed democratic revolution in a piece he wrote in 1915 (“Novye dannye o zakonakh razvitiya kapitalizma v zemledelii,” *PSS*, 27:129–227), and that Lenin had given great thought to the American context, referencing a piece he had started in 1917 (“Statistika i sotsiologiya,” *PSS*, 30:349–56.) Harry Haywood, *Black Bolshevik: Autobiography of an Afro-American Communist* (Chicago: Liberator Press, 1978), 218–35.
- 26 RGASPI, 495.155.56, 46–56; RGASPI, 495.155.56, 82–93.
- 27 “Report by J. La Guma to Anglo-American Secretariat, ECCI, 10 March 1927 (Extract),” in *South Africa and the Communist International: A Documentary History, Volume 1; Socialist Pilgrims to Bolshevik Footsoldiers 1919–1930*, edited by Apollon Davidson, Irina Filatova, Valentin Gorodnov, and Sheridan Johns (London: Frank Cass, 2003), 149–51.
- 28 RGASPI, 495.2.94, 115–71.
- 29 “Resolution of Politsecretariat of ECCI, 22 July 1927 (Extract),” in *South Africa and the Communist International: A Documentary History, Volume 1*, edited by Apollon Davidson et al., 161.
- 30 Sheridan Johns, *Raising the Red Flag: The International Socialist League and the Communist Party of South Africa, 1914–1932* (Bellville: Mayibuye Books, 1995), 228–9.
- 31 Marc Becker, “Mariátegui, the Comintern, and the Indigenous Question in Latin America,” *Science and Society* 70, no. 4 (October 2006): 450–79.
- 32 More research is needed to firmly make this statement in all regions. Marc Becker’s research in South America is countered by the claims of Drew Cottle who notes that in the American context, Indigenous peoples were never considered oppressed peoples as African Americans were. Drew Cottle, “The Colour-Line and the Third Period: A Comparative Analysis of American and Australian Communism and the Question of Race, 1928–1934,” *American Communist History* 10, no. 2 (2011): 124.
- 33 Allison Drew, “The New Line in South Africa: Ideology and Perception in a Very Small Communist Party,” in *In Search of Revolution: International Communist Parties in the Third Period*, edited by Matthew Worley

- (London: I.B. Tauris, 2004), 338; Drew, *Between Empire and Revolution: A Life of Sidney Bunting, 1873–1936* (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2007), 119–20.
- 34 Johns, *Raising the Red Flag*, 133–8; Drew, *Between Empire and Revolution*, 120–1; Drew, “The New Line in South Africa,” 338.
- 35 Johns, *Raising the Red Flag*, 146–60; Drew, *Between Empire and Revolution*, 136–41.
- 36 Jonathan Derrick, *Africa’s ‘Agitators’: Militant Anti-Colonialism in Africa and the West, 1918–1939* (London: Hurst and Company, 2008), 120; Drew, *Between Empire and Revolution*, 141.
- 37 Johns, *Raising the Red Flag*, 160–2.
- 38 LAC, R14860-0-3-E, K-269, 495-72-3, 139–43; LAC, R14860-0-3-E, K-269, 495-72-3, 148–9.
- 39 Drew, “The New Line in South Africa,” 339.
- 40 Johns, *Raising the Red Flag*, 228–9.
- 41 RGASPI, 495.20.653, 39–49.
- 42 The editors of *South Africa and the Communist International: A Documentary History* give a great description of the vagueness of the thesis in their introduction. See Apollon Davidson et al., eds., *South Africa and the Communist International: A Documentary History*, vol. 1, 12–13.
- 43 “Amendment to ‘Native Republic’ Slogan Proposed by CPSA Delegation, Sixth Comintern Congress, 25 August 1928,” in *South Africa and the Communist International: A Documentary History*, vol. 1, edited by Apollon Davidson et al., 189.
- 44 Drew, *Between Empire and Revolution*, 164.
- 45 Johns, *Raising the Red Flag*, 240–1; Drew, “The New Line in South Africa,” 343–4.
- 46 Johns, *Raising the Red Flag*, 262–81; Drew, “The New Line in South Africa,” 345–51; Drew, *Between Empire and Revolution*, 201–7.
- 47 For some examples, see “Must We Fight?” *Communist Party of South Africa Issuances, 1937–1943*, Box 1 (XX051-9.13), Folder 2 (C734b), Hoover Institute, Stanford University; “6 Point Communist Programme,” *Communist Party of South Africa Issuances, 1937–1943*, Box 1 (XX051-9.13), Folder 2 (C734b), Hoover Institute, Stanford University; “Organise a People’s Front in South Africa,” *Communist Party of South Africa Issuances, 1937–1943*, Box 1 (XX051-9.13), Folder 2 (C734b), Hoover Institute, Stanford University.
- 48 The White Australia policy was an immigration policy enforced in Australia that limited non-European immigration. It started as a reaction

to the influx of Asian labour in the mid-nineteenth century and remained in place in some form until the 1970s.

- 49 Evan Smith, "Against Fascism, for Racial Equality: Communists, Anti-Racism and the Road to the Second World War in Australia, South Africa and United States," *Labour History* (2017): 3–4.
- 50 State Archive of New South Wales (SANSW), MLMSS 5021 ADD-ON 1936/1, Ninth Annual Conference of the Communist Party of Australia, December 1929, "Draft Resolution on White Australia," 506–7.
- 51 "Communist Party's Fight for Aborigines: Draft Program of Struggle against Slavery – Full Economic, Political and Social Rights," *Worker's Weekly*, 24 September 1931: 2. There is some debate over whether this was influenced directly by the Comintern through Herbert Moore, an American communist who was sent to Australia and potentially promoted the concept of self-determination of nations on racial lines as a solution for Australian Aboriginals. I, personally, have not found any direct connection. Cottle, "The Colour-Line and the Third Period," 129.
- 52 Drachewych, *The Communist International*, 129–31.
- 53 T. Wright, *New Deal for the Aborigines* (Sydney: Consolidated Press, 1944).
- 54 Australia was given control of the Territory of Papua by the British in 1906. Following the First World War, the League of Nations established a mandate over German New Guinea, placing it under Australian oversight in 1920.
- 55 Drachewych, *The Communist International*, 137–8.
- 56 For some examples, see University of Melbourne Archives (UMA), 80.162, 1, 1944, "Old Order Must Not Return to New Guinea," *The Guardian*, no. 125, 21 January 1944; UMA, 80.162, 1, 1945, "Digger Urges New Deal for Papuans," *The Guardian*, no. 176, 26 January 1945.
- 57 Kerry Taylor, "The Communist Party of New Zealand and the Third Period, 1928–35," in *In Search of Revolution*, edited by Matthew Worley, 270.
- 58 RGASPI, 495.20.430, 26.
- 59 RGASPI, 495.29.430, 26.
- 60 *Ibid.*, 26–7.
- 61 RGASPI, 495.20.430, 74–5. The Anglo-American Secretariat also noted the CPNZ's lack of Maori membership and specifically focused on the party's need to develop a platform for Maori peoples and promote self-determination for Samoa and Maoris. It also noted that Maori support for recent strikes in New Zealand showed the Maoris' revolutionary potential to work with white workers. RGASPI 495.20.430, 138–52.

- 62 RGASPI, 495.20.430, 206
- 63 Ibid., 207–16.
- 64 Kerry Taylor, “‘Potential Allies of the Working Class’: The Communist Party of New Zealand and Maori, 1921–52,” in *On the Left: Essays on Socialism in New Zealand*, edited by Pat Moloney and Kerry Taylor (Dunedin: University of Otago Press, 2002), 103–15.
- 65 For example, LAC, R14860-0-3-E, K-274, 495.98.46, 31. For more information, see Drachewych, *The Communist International*, chap. 4.
- 66 “Theses on the Revolutionary Movement in the Colonies and Semicolonies,” *International Press Correspondence* 8, no. 88 (12 December 1928), 1662.
- 67 LAC, R14860-0-3-E, K-291, 495.98.188B, 1–19.
- 68 Communist Party of Canada, “Resolution on Support to the Native Indian Population,” in *We Propose: Resolutions Adopted at the Eighth Dominion Convention of the Communist Party of Canada, Held in Toronto, October 8–13, 1937* (Toronto, 1937), 67.
- 69 RGASPI, 495.20.294, 21–4; RGASPI, 495.20.294, 117–18.
- 70 *Canada’s Party of Socialism: History of the Communist Party of Canada 1921–1976* (Toronto: Progress Books, 1982), 272.
- 71 LAC, R14860-0-3-E, K-285, 495.98.151, 34, 54; Ian Angus, *Canadian Bolsheviks: The Early Years of the Communist Party of Canada* (Montreal: Vanguard Publications, 1981), 291.
- 72 LAC, R14860-0-3-E, K-285, 495.98.151, 64–74; LAC, R14860-0-3-E, K-288, 495.98.164, 13–24; LAC, R14860-0-3-E, K-291, 495.98.188, 66.
- 73 Werner Cohn, “The Persecution of Japanese Canadians and the Political Left in British Columbia, December 1941–March 1942,” *BC Studies*, no. 68 (Winter 1985–86): 3–22.

The Comintern and the Question of Race in the South American Andes

Marc Becker

In the 1920s, the Comintern's discussions of the role of race and nationalism in a revolutionary movement soon extended to Latin America with the Comintern's proposal to carve an "Indian Republic" out of the Quechua and Aymara peoples in the mountainous Andean region of South America – an area where Tawantinsuyu, the old Inka empire, had flourished before the arrival of the Spanish in 1532. The persistent question of whether a people's oppression was primarily an issue of class, race, or nationality came to a head at a conference of Latin American communist parties in Buenos Aires in June 1929. At this meeting, the Peruvian Marxist intellectual José Carlos Mariátegui, in a lengthy treatise titled *El problema de las razas en la América Latina* (The Problem of Race in Latin America), adamantly maintained that the "Indian question" was fundamentally one of class relations in which the bourgeoisie oppressed a rural proletariat, and that this situation could only be addressed through fundamental alterations to the land tenure system.

Meanwhile, in neighbouring Ecuador, communist leader Ricardo Paredes embraced the language of Indigenous nationalities and made it a key part of the party's struggle, even though activists never made serious moves to seek independence to the point of separation from the current nation-state as the Comintern proposed. Indigenous activists in Ecuador subsequently assumed the discourse of Indigenous nationalism and used it to construct a powerful social movement for social justice, while their counterparts in Peru ultimately failed in an attempt to gain power through armed struggle. Inadvertently, in

following centralized Comintern dictates, Ecuadorian communists contributed to the ideology of Indigenous nationalism. These contrasting responses in the South American Andes were part of intense debates among communist activists worldwide about whether marginalized and impoverished ethnic populations comprised national or racial minorities, and what the relationship of their identities to the larger class struggle should be.

This chapter extends an examination of the Comintern's discussion of race and nationalism in other areas of the world to Latin America. It interrogates two contrasting responses to the national and race questions in neighbouring Andean countries. While external orders may have had limited immediate applicability to the current political context and economic necessities, some activists found that they could exploit rhetorical devices in ways that worked to their advantage, even though the outcome might not be the one that the Comintern initially imagined.

THE “INDIAN QUESTION”

If the 1928 Sixth Congress led the Comintern to “discover” Latin America, the First Conference of the Communist Parties of Latin America in Buenos Aires in 1929 led Latin Americans to “discover” Indigenous peoples.¹ The proposal to establish an “Indian Republic in South America” originated in one of the most hotly disputed issues at the Comintern’s Sixth Congress concerning the role of racial and ethnic minorities within a country’s larger revolutionary struggle. Emerging out of these pivotal debates on the “Negro question” at the Sixth Congress in Moscow, race became one of the most contentious and widely debated topics the following year in Buenos Aires. The complicated ramifications of building alliances across racial and class divides and problems with “white chauvinism” were similar in South America to ones militants encountered in South Africa and the United States, and raise similar issues regarding the construction of ethnic and national identities. Even the process through which this topic came to be raised at the Buenos Aires conference indicates the marginalized nature of discussions of race among communists in Latin America. Although the original agenda that Victorio Codovilla published in *La Correspondencia Sudamericana* included the “Cuestión campesina” (peasant question), there was no mention of engaging the

issues of race or Latin America's Indigenous peoples.² According to Jürgen Mothes, Jules Humbert-Droz, a member of the Executive Committee of the Communist International (ECCI), insisted that Codovilla include a discussion of race on the meeting's agenda.³ As head of the Latin Secretariat, Humbert-Droz presented a report on Latin America to the Sixth Congress and was largely responsible for bringing the region to the Comintern's attention.⁴ As a result, in April, only two months before the conference, Codovilla added a debate on "The Problem of Race in Latin America," with a Peruvian, Brazilian, and Cuban presenting theses on the subject. In a letter on 29 March 1929, Codovilla specifically requested that Mariátegui prepare a document for the meeting on the "Indians" struggle for emancipation from their current state of slavery for the meeting. Mariátegui was already well known for his defense of Peru's marginalized rural Indigenous peoples; Codovilla noted that he was asking Mariátegui to address this subject because of his "profound knowledge" of the problem, his "serious studies" on the topic, and because he was the only person who could provide a solid base on which the Comintern could build its strategies.⁵

Without outside intervention, Comintern leaders in Latin America most likely would not have raised the question of the role of Indigenous peoples in the revolutionary movement. It is a reflection of the white, urban focus of the Comintern that it had to turn to a party in Peru with which it had minimal contact to make a presentation on this issue. This further highlights the unique role that Mariátegui played in these debates; rather than needing Comintern encouragement to engage Indigenous issues, he was tasked with introducing communists (with whom he had previously had minimal contact) to Latin America's racial dynamics. He was far ahead of most other South American communists in his understanding of race, and this contributed to a perhaps inevitable clash between European and Indigenous perspectives on the revolutionary struggle in Latin America. Without Indigenous or Afro-Latin intellectuals (such as Harry Haywood in the United States) in the South American Bureau, or at least someone who could clearly articulate and argue passionately for these perspectives, Comintern proposals on the problem of race in Latin American would tend to fall short of their potential. Nevertheless, the Communist International increasingly recognized the crucial role of ethnic groups in emerging revolutionary movements, and pressed onward with attempts to organize this population.

THE PROBLEM OF RACE

On the morning of 8 June 1929, delegates at the Buenos Aires conference turned their attention to the fifth point on the agenda, "The Problem of Race in Latin America." "Juárez" from Cuba brought a prepared statement on the Negro question (especially as it related to Cuba), and "Leoncio" from Brazil critiqued the role of Indians and Africans in his country. Mariátegui's historical and socio-economic overview of Indians in Latin America, however, was the longest and most controversial presentation. It represents his most detailed and penetrating analysis of the subject. Dr Hugo Pesce, presenting the document under the alias "Saco" (in honour of the famed anarchist militant Nicola Sacco executed two years earlier in Massachusetts), introduced the discussion by observing that this was "the first time that an International Congress of Communist Parties has focused their attention in such a broad and specific manner on the racial problem in Latin America." This was an issue that had received little serious study, and bourgeois critiques and capitalist governments had corrupted interpretations of the problem. A lack of rigorous statistical studies and analyses further hindered examinations. Pesce called for an objective study of the racial problem grounded in a Marxist methodology informed by a knowledge of class struggle in order to arrive at a revolutionary understanding consistent with Comintern policies.⁶

Mariátegui's lengthy thesis, which focused largely but by no means exclusively on Peru and Indigenous peoples, surveyed changes from the time of the Incas and Aztecs, through the Spanish conquest and colonial period, and into the twentieth century, with additional sections on blacks, *mestizos*, and mulattos. Firmly grounding the discussion in a class analysis, Mariátegui began his discussion of race with the argument that race disguised underlying class exploitation rooted in an unequal distribution of land: "In Latin American bourgeois intellectual speculation, the race question serves, among other things, to disguise or evade the continent's real problems. Marxist criticism has the unavoidable obligation of establishing it in real terms, ridding it of all sophistic or pedantic equivocation. Economically, socially, and politically, the race question, like the land question, is fundamentally that of liquidating feudalism."⁷

In Mariátegui's view, the Indigenous problem in Latin America was an economic and social issue which for Indigenous peoples meant an

agrarian problem, and it needed to be addressed at the level of land tenure relations. Rather than embracing typical *indigenista* ideologies, which maintained that Indigenous problems would be solved through their assimilation into the mestizo population, Mariátegui believed that white colonization had “only retarding and depressive effects in the life of the Indigenous races.”⁸ Indigenous peoples wanted equality, but they did not want to lose their unique identities. Mariátegui categorically rejected the notion that the Indian question was a racial problem, not only because he denied that Indigenous peoples were racially inferior but also because he rejected biological theories that proposed that their position could be strengthened through “crossing the Indigenous race with ‘superior’ foreign races.”⁹ Communist parties that sought racial solutions to this problem of exploitation were simply succumbing to a bourgeois distraction that would never be able to address it, and it was a mistake for the Comintern to look in that direction for answers.

Much like his denial that mestizaje would improve the “Indian” race, Mariátegui also rejected the notion that there was something innate within Indigenous peoples that would lead to their liberation. “It would be foolish and dangerous to oppose the racism of those who deprecate the Indian because they believe in the absolute and permanent superiority of the white race,” Mariátegui wrote, “with the racism of those who overestimate the Indian with a messianic faith in their mission as a race in the American renaissance.” Indigenous societies responded to the same socio-economic laws that governed any other culture. “By itself, the race has not risen,” Mariátegui observed. “What ensures its emancipation is the dynamism of an economy and culture that carries the seed of socialism in its midst.”¹⁰ This underscores E.J. Hobsbawm’s observation that racial discrimination and ethnic differences rarely lead to a nationalist movement. Indigenous liberation would follow along the same lines, and be subject to the same laws of history, as that of the working class.¹¹ In countries with large Indigenous and black populations the racial factor must be converted into a revolutionary factor, Mariátegui maintained. In order to succeed, revolutionaries must convince Indigenous peoples and blacks that only a workers’ and peasants’ government composed of all races could emancipate them from their oppression.¹²

Whether rural poverty was primarily a result of racial discrimination or of class exploitation is an issue that has long been debated in Latin America.¹³ Mariátegui, never one for simplistic solutions to problems,

appreciated the complicated nature of the interactions between race and class. “It is possible to try to face the solution that the problem of races requires,” he noted, “and establish, as a result, the tasks that concern the Communist Parties in Latin America.”¹⁴ Racism was a very real problem that needed to be confronted before class solidarity could be built, but the two forms of identity were deeply intertwined. Marxists still experienced difficulties in conceptualizing issues of racial identity, with many militants considering it to be a form of false consciousness that distracted from the more important proletarian class struggle. Nevertheless, in terms of lived experiences, race and ethnicity repeatedly overpowered class in debates over which was more important. Mariátegui noted that Indigenous peoples, for good reason, often viewed mestizos as their oppressors, and only the development of a class consciousness could break through the racial hatred that divided these groups. Not only did they have an understandable disdain for their white and mestizo exploiters, but it was “not unusual to find prejudice as to the inferiority of the Indian among the very urban elements that proclaim themselves to be revolutionaries.”¹⁵

Converting the race issue into class terms would, according to Mariátegui, lead Indigenous peoples and blacks into a central role in the revolutionary movement. He wrote: “Only the struggle of Indians, proletarians and peasants in strict alliance with the mestizo and white proletariat against the feudal and capitalist regime will permit the free development of the Indians’ racial characteristics.” This class struggle building on the Indigenous collective spirit, and not the encouragement of a movement toward self-determination, would be what would break down national borders dividing Indigenous groups and lead “to the political autonomy of the race.”¹⁶ After working through these issues, Mariátegui clearly and unapologetically cast the Indian question as a class, not racial or national, struggle. He contended that the Comintern’s policy of establishing Native Republics would not lead to the material improvement of the subaltern masses; rather, removing them from existing nation-state structures would only ensure their increased poverty and marginalization. Mariátegui maintained that the best way to achieve liberation for the Indigenous (and African) masses would be for them to join workers and others in a struggle for a socialist revolution. The categories of race and class were interlinked – one could not be understood without the other – and both needed to be grasped in order to understand diverse, multicultural countries like Peru.

In the conclusion to his lengthy statement on race in Latin America, Mariátegui directly contradicted the Comintern's proposal to establish an Indian republic in the South American Andes, where a concentration of Quechua and Aymara peoples formed a majority of the population. Although Mariátegui conceded that the establishment of such autonomous republics might work elsewhere, in Peru the proposal was the result of not understanding the socio-economic situation of the Indigenous masses. "The construction of an autonomous state from the Indian race," Mariátegui maintained, "would not lead to the dictatorship of the Indian proletariat, much less the formation of an Indian state without classes." Instead, the result would be "an Indian bourgeois state with all of the internal and external contradictions of other bourgeois states." Liberating the race without addressing underlying class issues would lead to an Indigenous bourgeois state as exploitative as the current European-dominated one. Mariátegui continued to note that "only the revolutionary class movement of the exploited Indigenous masses can open a path to the true liberation of their race" which would result in political self-determination.¹⁷ Mariátegui's direct challenge to Comintern dictates is an example of local party activists refusing to accept policies passively, but instead actively engaging and influencing these decisions.

ECUADOR

Whereas Mariátegui criticized a Comintern proposal to create an Indigenous republic in the Andes, his Ecuadorian counterparts embraced the language of Indigenous nationalism and made it a key part of their struggle. Indigenous activists subsequently took up this discourse and used it to construct a powerful movement for social justice. Inadvertently, in following centralized Comintern dictates, Ecuadorian communists contributed to the ideology of Indigenous nationalism on which this movement was built.

Such communist contributions to these movements are largely unknown, both in Ecuador and more broadly. A dearth of good studies and an absence of documents have resulted in a history full of silences and legends, with participants forwarding multiple conflicting interpretations in order to justify different ideological positions. It has also led to assumptions based not on historical research but on self-perpetuating stereotypes. One of the most persistent of them is that the left treated Indigenous peoples in a paternalistic fashion and

attempted to interpret their situation in class terms as peasants instead of as ethnicities. Arguments that present Marxists as relegating ethnic, national, and racial identities to a secondary status ignore the Comintern's critical role in constructing the concept of Indigenous nationalities in South America.

More than anyone else, Ricardo Paredes was associated with and helped define the direction of the revolutionary Marxist tradition in Ecuador. Although he never gained the international stature or renown of his contemporaries José Carlos Mariátegui in Peru or Julio Antonio Mella in Cuba, he was known as the "Apostle of Ecuadorian Communism" and played a similar role in organizing and consolidating the Communist Party of Ecuador.¹⁸ Although Paredes lacked Mariátegui's intellectual stature, he did contribute something that his Peruvian counterpart could not offer. Confined to a wheelchair in his house in Lima on the Peruvian coast, Mariátegui lacked direct knowledge of Indigenous lives in the rural highlands. By contrast, Paredes, similar to Salvador Allende and Ernesto "Che" Guevara, was a medical doctor who had direct knowledge of human suffering. Paredes travelled frequently throughout the country, and gained immediate impressions of oppression that Mariátegui lacked. Whereas Mariátegui critiqued his Peruvian reality from an intellectual perspective, Paredes approached Ecuador as a grassroots political organizer. Robert Alexander later wrote that communist organizing in Indigenous communities was "more due to the personal interest of the Party's founder, Dr. Ricardo Paredes, than to any conscious policy of the Party." Alexander added that as "an avid student of the Indian problem in Ecuador, he won a certain degree of confidence from the aborigines."¹⁹ Inevitably, these different perspectives influenced their critiques of the Indigenous question and how they viewed the issue of Indigenous nationalities.

Paredes actively participated in the Sixth Congress, particularly in regards to issues surrounding the role of the rural masses in a communist revolution. Alexei Páez Cordero notes the "great relevance" of his proposals to the Congress.²⁰ In discussions of the revolutionary movement in the colonies, Paredes argued for a more complex understanding of colonialism. A new category of "dependent countries" was needed for those "which have been penetrated economically by imperialism but which retain a certain political independence."²¹ He disagreed with a proposal to expropriate land from large estates and distribute it to the poor in small private parcels. He presented

two arguments against this strategy. First, such an approach would not address fundamental problems in the existing land tenure system. Second, building on existing community structures, much like Mariátegui advocated in neighbouring Peru, would prove rewarding in developing a socialist system. Indigenous society naturally tended toward socialism, Paredes believed, and Spanish colonization had disrupted this process. “The American Indians are imbued with a remarkable collectivist spirit,” Paredes stated. “These elements must be utilized in the proletarian State for the construction of socialism.” As evidence of this strategy’s potential, he pointed to four Indigenous insurrections in 1926 alone as important examples of rural communist organizing efforts.²² They “highlighted the important revolutionary role of the Indians in Ecuador in the fight against the capitalist yoke.”²³ Paredes proposed that “it is possible that the revolutionary struggle will be started by a revolt of the agricultural workers and peasants against the big landowners and the government.” But the key issue was one of organization: “The proletariat will be able to win the hegemony with the aid of the peasantry only if it has a Communist Party.”²⁴ His arguments swayed the Comintern, and the Congress’s final resolution advocated that land expropriated from plantations and haciendas be devoted to “the collective cultivation of the agricultural workers.” The examples of Indigenous revolts Paredes brought to the attention of the assembly were listed as evidence of the “widening and deepening of the revolutionary process” in Latin America.²⁵

When the 1928 Sixth Congress launched what has come to be known as an “ultraleft” phase, with a “class against class” organizing strategy replacing that of building alliances with other leftist forces, the Comintern urged local parties to organize worker-peasant coalitions in rural areas. Paredes can be seen as partially responsible for this direction as he brought his experiences with Indigenous communities in Ecuador to the table. He told the Congress:

The revolutionary problem is linked up with that of the oppressed masses such as the Indians of Latin America. In some countries, Indians constitute the biggest section of the rural population; they suffer much more than white and half-caste workers from the exploitation of the landed proprietors. Indians who are considered an inferior race are treated more brutally. All these factors have created among the Indian workers and peasants a spirit of solidarity and a class spirit of the exploited.

Therefore, Indians are very revolutionary elements. I think this problem of oppressed races must be dealt with in the programme.²⁶

Even before the Comintern dictated that local parties should work with oppressed populations, communists (with those in Mexico taking the lead) developed strong connections with peasant movements.²⁷ In Ecuador, even though the Ecuadorian Socialist Party (PSE) had incorporated Indigenous peoples and issues into their party, the Sixth Congress triggered an intensification of rural activism.

Despite intense pressure from Moscow, Mariátegui refused to transform the Peruvian Socialist Party into a communist one, and it was only after his death in 1930 that others took that step.²⁸ Often the Peruvian party's hardline turn is interpreted as an error, an action that destroyed the gains Mariátegui had struggled so hard to make. Similarly in Ecuador, the United States Embassy reported that "Communism, affiliated with the Third International, was practically exterminated upon the dissolution of the PSE." Paredes "was the only outstanding person who remained and he was followed by a small group of equally fanatical admirers." Membership in the local party had been reduced to seventy-five people.²⁹ Although becoming a section of the Communist International did narrow the base of the party, and perhaps prevented it from gaining broad appeal, it did contribute to the construction of a strong Indigenous movement with arguably positive results.

Others disagreed with Paredes's decision to transform the Ecuadorian Socialist Party into a communist one. In 1930, Luis Gerardo Gallegos returned from a trip to the Soviet Union for the Fifth World Congress of Red Trade Unions deeply disillusioned by what he had seen; he requested that the party disaffiliate itself from the Comintern. Gallegos published a tract, *Rusia Soviética y la revolución mundial* (Soviet Russia and the World Revolution), in which he condemned what he saw as a corrupt Soviet bureaucracy distant from the visions of Marx and Lenin. He considered the Comintern's instructions for the Ecuadorian party, including a demand that it transform itself into a communist party based on a (non-existent) proletariat, to be woefully ignorant of local conditions. Gallegos was particularly critical of the Comintern's position pressing the party to work in Indigenous communities and its stance on the national question. Gallegos quoted from the Comintern's directive to the party: "to work intensely among poor peasants and, in particular, among Indians and in big agrarian

communities in the highlands and on landed estates. The Communist Party should commit itself completely to the Indian masses to sustain and drive its struggles for land and for national independence, exposing the roles of priests and the church. The Party should not consider the problem of the Indian only as the problem land but rather one that also includes the national question.”³⁰

Similar to Mariátegui, Gallegos considered this position to be in error, both because encouraging Indigenous uprisings was criminally irresponsible and would only result in thousands of deaths, and also because encouraging the constructions of Indigenous nationalities would foster racial tensions while Lenin favoured racial equality. Instead, Gallegos preferred to develop policies more appropriate to their local realities. Rather than being subject to the demands of a far-off centralized organism – the “Red Pope” was Gallegos’s term for it – the dissidents wished to free themselves from this dogmatic control in order to become a truly revolutionary party.³¹

The following month, the dissidents distributed a lengthy communiqué in which they elaborated on their reasons for breaking from the communists. They declared the Third International dead, and called on communists to leave the “red mummy” behind if they wished to fulfill their historic destiny. The group complained that the only purpose for the Comintern was the defense of the USSR, and criticized its advocacy for “the creation of autonomous Black and Indigenous Republics.” This policy “divided the Blacks into one part, whites into another, and Indians into another, sustaining the reactionary principle of racial inferiority.”³²

Despite these complaints, once the Comintern raised the issue of Indigenous nationalities, it became an urgent and pressing issue across South America. For example, the Bolivian Communist Party stated in 1932 that “the Indigenous problem, completely ignored by ‘leftist’ intellectuals, undervalued and misunderstood by anarchist intellectuals and, it goes without saying, by yellow union bosses, was solidly proposed by our grouping in La Paz.”³³ Leftists in Ecuador also exhibited an appreciation for the role that ethnicity played in the structure of class societies. “The working class is subjected to a double yoke,” Paredes noted. They face “racial oppression (prejudice as the ‘inferior race’), and economic oppression.” This double oppression led to a growing “consciousness of their distinct class interests.”³⁴ Paredes recognized the nature of ethnic and economic structures in the Andes, and argued that they led to a high degree of class

consciousness among the Indians. Under Comintern guidance, activists increasingly spoke of the presence of oppressed Indigenous nationalities in Ecuador.³⁵

In Ecuador, communist actions mirrored the realities analyzed by Mariátegui in neighbouring Peru: “The problem is not racial, but social and economic; but the race has its role and the means to confront it.”³⁶ There is little evidence of communists decrying race as a “false consciousness” that needed to be replaced with class rhetoric, as seemingly became the case in neighbouring Peru and has often been assumed to be the case in Ecuador as well.³⁷ Rather, as would become common in the 1980s, the Indigenous peasantry was seen as facing the “double dimension” of class exploitation and racial discrimination that needed to be addressed on both fronts.³⁸

Similar to Mariátegui, Ecuadorian leftists understood that “the Indian peasants will only understand individuals from their own midst who speak to them in their own language,” and proposed training Indigenous leaders who would then return to work for the “emancipation of this race.” Leftist outsiders would not dictate to Indigenous peoples the nature of the demands they would make, but rather their role would be to help give an organizational cohesion to those demands. Pointing to a long history of insurrections, Mariátegui rejected the notion that Indigenous peoples were incapable of a revolutionary struggle. Indigenous uprisings had already demonstrated a remarkable level of resistance in rural communities. Once Indigenous peoples were introduced to a revolutionary consciousness, they would be unequaled in their struggle for socialism.³⁹

LEGACIES

Ideologically, the Peruvian and Ecuadorian Marxists, as well as those elsewhere in the Andes, were not that far apart on how they viewed the Indigenous question. Paredes and Mariátegui both agreed on the revolutionary potential of the Indigenous masses, and believed that they were capable of leading themselves to liberation in alliance with a class-based party. Nevertheless, over the course of the twentieth century Indigenous organizing efforts took radically different directions in the two countries.

In Peru, a splinter group from the Communist Party of Peru declared that they would follow the “shining path of José Carlos Mariátegui” in transforming the country’s backward and feudalistic economy into

one that would be modern and just. This group, which came to be known as *Sendero Luminoso*, launched their people's war in the rural Peruvian highlands in May 1980, just as the rest of the country turned from twelve years of military juntas to an elected, civilian government. Ultimately, their armed uprising failed, resulting in the capture of their leader Abimael Guzmán in 1992 and the deaths of 70,000 people.

In Ecuador, well-organized Indigenous communities took to the streets in June 1990, not in an armed uprising but with a civic strike that shut down the country for a week. As with their counterparts in Peru, a demand to address unequal and unjust agrarian structures fueled their revolt. But, in addition, the Ecuadorian activists made other, ideological demands. Specifically, they called for the revision of the constitution to recognize the presence of diverse Indigenous nationalities in the country. Ultimately, they were successful in this goal, and in 2008 the Ecuadorian constitution was revised to recognize the country as a plurinational state.

It is too reductionist to draw a straight line from differing responses to Comintern dictates in the 1920s to contrasting outcomes in the 1990s, but many scholars have attempted to explain, in a not entirely satisfactory fashion, why protest in two neighbouring countries with very similar social and economic situations developed in such different manners.⁴⁰ Many factors can account for this divergence, and undoubtedly one of those is contrasting responses to ideological constructions. Following Mariátegui's lead, Peruvian Marxists pursued a class-based approach that downplayed ethnic identities. In accordance with Comintern dictates, throughout the twentieth century their Ecuadorian counterparts followed Paredes in appealing to the discourse of Indigenous nationalities. By the 1980s, Indigenous peoples in Ecuador had claimed this language as their own, and used it to build one of the strongest social movements in the Americas.

NOTES

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II

Various Forms of Chineseness in the Origins of Southeast Asian Communism

Kankan Xie

INTRODUCTION

People often see the origins of communist movements in Southeast Asia and the region's overseas Chinese community as closely intertwined. This perception is evident in the cases of densely Chinese-populated areas such as Malaya and Siam (Thailand), as well as places like Vietnam and Cambodia, where China's influence has been historically strong in both political and cultural domains. Admittedly, it is very convenient to connect many Chinese-involved communist activities in Southeast Asia to the emergence of the communist party in China, but the simplistic argument – that Southeast Asia imports communism from China – is severely problematic. While overseas Chinese did play critical roles in many radical movements in Southeast Asia, the diffusion of left-wing ideology and the emergence of the twentieth-century communist movements in the region could also be traced to many other sources: the influence of the European colonial powers, the shifting world order shaped by the First World War and the Great Depression, the victory of the Bolshevik Revolution, and perhaps most importantly, the rise of national awareness across the colonized world.

Against this backdrop, the Comintern was established in 1919 in hopes of promoting communist revolutions worldwide. Communism during the interwar period, therefore, tended to distinguish itself from other political movements for its internationalist outlook and organizational framework. In practice, however, the Comintern was often accused of failing to provide useful guidance due to its lack of proper

understanding of local situations. Owing to the similar socio-political circumstances of the colonial and semi-colonial societies, early communist movements in Asia shared many common features. Yet their adaptation of Marxist ideology and tactics to particular circumstances varied drastically from place to place. Both ideology and strategies were always subject to conflicting interpretations and local conditions. Heated discussions focused on the role of the nationalist bourgeoisie in proletariat-led struggles against European imperialism, the position of the supposedly atheist communists in societies where religion functioned as the only force that could unite the masses, the leadership of the minority proletariat vis-à-vis the mass support of the predominant yet mostly uneducated peasantry, and so on. Among these contradictions, the issue of ethnicity, most acutely illustrated by the paradoxical role of the overseas Chinese community, was especially controversial. On the one hand, a large number of politically aware Chinese immigrants, keen to inspire peoples of Southeast Asia to fight for rights equal to those enjoyed by Europeans, were active in introducing China's radical revolutionary experience. On the other hand, as Harry Benda suggests, the notion of a "middle class" is mostly absent within the native populations in the colonial societies of Southeast Asia.¹ Alien elements such as ethnic Chinese shopkeepers and moneylenders have been historically identified as exploiters, not political allies. Therefore, it was the Chinese, rather than "distant European wholesalers or administrators," who were commonly targeted by indigenous radicals in their movements of dissent and rebellion.

This research explores the multifaceted nature of "Chineseness." It could mean China as the source of communist revolutionary inspiration and the Chinese as agents for the spread of Marxist ideology. By using the rise of Chinese communism as the basic template for comparison, this chapter also scrutinizes early communist movements in the Dutch East Indies, French Indochina, and British Malaya. I also compare the three colonial states with Siam, which has never fallen under formal European colonial domination. Instead of following a strict chronological order or investigating events on a country-by-country basis, the analysis is structured thematically by focusing on three different yet interrelated themes: (1) anti-imperialism as a common course pursued by the colonial and semi-colonial East; (2) the embrace of revolution from China; and (3) resistance to Chineseness in various forms of nationalist movements.

UNPACKING “CHINESENESS”

While the very idea of “China” may seem to exist as an unambiguous or unquestionable entity, multiple expressions denote different aspects of China and Chineseness.² What makes the study of Chineseness particularly difficult, as Ien Ang observes, is the emergence of a so-called diasporic paradigm. China is no longer an ontologically stable object of study, but something that transcends boundaries in both geographical and cultural senses, as many scholars studying the Chinese diaspora have pointed out. Nor is the content of Chineseness by any means fixed. Instead, it functions as an “open and indeterminate signifier,” whose meanings are subject to constant interrogation and renegotiation in different parts of this diaspora.³ Despite the similarities in their experiences with receiving immigrants from China in different phases of history, the four Southeast Asian states varied considerably with respect to the forms of Chinese political participation in the interwar period. While certain sections of the Chinese diaspora (e.g., some of the local-born “Peranakan,” or Straits-born Chinese, in Malay Archipelago communities) were more assimilated into their host societies, and hence more invested in local politics than the sojourners, many more remained primarily concerned with politics back in China. Admittedly, there was never a clear boundary between these two groups. Complex nuances under and across different categories in the rapidly changing political landscape in late-colonial Southeast Asia were characteristic of this period. As Allen Chun notes:

The transformation of Chinese overseas into “overseas Chinese” (*hua-ch’iao*) was, then, an expansion of Chinese nationalism abroad that attempted to galvanize Chinese identity from what was once kin-centered, dialect groups into a radically new “imagined community” reeducated in standard Mandarin and the orthodox teachings of Chinese civilization. For Chinese who had not severed ties with their homeland, this new sense of identity could be seen as an extension of a primordial Chineseness. For those whose cultural lifestyles had become largely assimilated or syncretic in nature, this new kind of identity was, instead, a source of alienation.⁴

As far as politics is concerned, the diasporic paradigm has its limitations. The key question, as Philip Kuhn puts it, is to study “the ‘others’

whom the Chinese find themselves among.”⁵ The geographical proximity and the frequent exchange of information between China and Southeast Asia – as well as various networks inside Southeast Asia itself – further complicates the issue. Admittedly, China’s geopolitical influence was important to the diasporic communities, but such an influence also went far beyond them. It was not uncommon for native intellectuals to refer to the “Chinese experience” when contemplating issues specific to their own. Likewise, the Chinese intelligentsia was also constantly exposed to ideas from non-Western sources. While China often occupies the centre stage of scholarly discussions on Asian politics, it is severely problematic to adopt a simplistic “center-periphery” framework in which neighbouring countries are seen as passive receivers of Chinese influence, either directly from China or indirectly through the introduction of the Chinese overseas. After all, Southeast Asia is by no means China’s periphery. The almost simultaneous rise of communism in China and Southeast Asia during the interwar period is an example that challenges the very fundamentals of such a paradigm.

In *Cultural China: The Periphery as the Center*, Tu Wei-ming challenges the essentialist view that always puts China at the core of its sphere of influence.⁶ As more overseas Chinese get permanently settled in their host countries while more Chinese professionals migrate to the West, Tu argues that the diaspora comes to constitute new cultural centers for a renewed sense of Chineseness in the contemporary era. In his concept of “Cultural China,” there are three universes: (1) societies in which the ethnic Chinese account for the overwhelming majority, such as mainland China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong; (2) the overseas Chinese communities; and (3) intellectuals who share general interests in the broadly defined Chinese world, which transcends national boundaries and discourses. Although Tu’s theory primarily relates to the contemporary era, such a framework is useful in analyzing the multilayered and contested roles of Chineseness in the political turmoil of Southeast Asia during the interwar period. To understand early Asian communist movements, it is essential to grasp at least three interrelated themes, namely (1) the mutual geopolitical influence of China and Southeast Asia; (2) the contradictory roles of the Chinese diasporic communities; and (3) the native intellectuals’ attempts to combine communism with nationalist/patriotic/religious traditions, which sometimes entailed an anti-Chinese outlook.

CONTESTING IMPERIALISM: CHINA AS A FRAME OF REFERENCE

According to orthodox Marxist theories, socialism could be realized only in fully developed capitalist societies in which the working class is politically aware and organizationally strong. For a long time, people believed that the socialist revolution would first take place in highly industrialized Western Europe where capitalism was most developed. Nevertheless, despite Marx's prediction that capitalism would soon collapse because of its intrinsic shortcomings, the imperial powers of the West seemed to have become even more prosperous by the turn of the twentieth century. With the firm establishment of the capitalist world economic system, the possession of colonies contributed to the improvement of the welfare of the European working class, which significantly eased the tension between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. Instead of fighting against colonialism through socialist revolution, many social democrats in the West switched their focus to active participation in existing democratic political institutions. The purpose was to serve the "interests and desires" of the European working class. This sometimes meant justifying the possession of colonies and championing the supposedly positive civilizing effect of colonialism.⁷ Hence, there was a tendency at the beginning of the twentieth century for the Western European socialist parties to prioritize the European working class over the exploited colonies, despite the fact that capitalism had expanded into less developed parts of the world through imperialism.⁸ The colonial problem remained a somewhat peripheral concern until the communists' victory in the October Revolution in Russia, after which Leninist Marxism came to function as a workable theoretical foundation for socialist revolutions in the less developed colonial and semi-colonial East. It was against this backdrop that the Comintern was founded in 1919 to coordinate world communist revolutions against Western imperialism.

With almost no exceptions, scholarly works on the rise of Asian communism usually cover two major interrelated aspects, namely the emergence of communist movements across Asia as an integral part of the Comintern-facilitated worldwide revolution against Western imperialism, and the ways in which an adopted Marxist ideology came to be locally intertwined with indigenous radicalism. In China, the spread of the Marxist ideology in the immediate aftermath of the October Revolution coincided with the various socialist currents that

emerged in China's New Culture Movement.⁹ With an emphasis on democracy and science, the movement aimed to rescue China from a cultural decay attributed to obsolete Confucius traditions. A resolution of the Paris Peace Conference after the First World War further catalyzed the cultural movement. It stipulated that Germany would transfer its rights over Shandong to Japan. The protest then turned into the highly politicized anti-imperialist May Fourth Movement of 1919. The Chinese intelligentsia was greatly frustrated by the contradiction between the appeals of Western modernity on the one hand, and the fact that Western imperialism had become increasingly aggressive towards the East on the other. As a result, the movement paved the road for the dissemination of Marxist-Leninist ideology under the profound influence of Russia's October Revolution.

As Dirlit suggests, the relationship between the May Fourth Movement in 1919 and the establishment of the Communist Party of China (CCP) in 1921 was dialectical rather than evolutionary.¹⁰ "The [Communist Party] was founded by radicals who only imperfectly appreciated Marxism as a revolutionary and social theory, and were only tenuously committed to it as a political ideology."¹¹ Chinese intellectuals' understanding of Marxist theories was relatively shallow at the time. Various strains of socialism prevailed. The foundation of the CCP – which largely transplanted its organizational principles from their Russian Bolshevik counterparts – marked the formal assertion of the revolutionary Marxist-Leninist identity of Chinese radicalism from 1921 onward. This assertion, as Dirlit pointed out, required the suppression of other forms of socialism: Chinese communists showed almost no interest in European Marxist literature, and "the works on Marxism that found their way into China between 1921 and 1927 were almost exclusively of Bolshevik origin." In other words, "Chinese Marxists discovered in Bolshevism an ideology of action that quickly moved them into revolutionary practice."¹²

Unsurprisingly, ideological lines were vaguely drawn in the emerging period of the Chinese communist movement. There was already a well-developed radical alliance, based largely on pre-existing intellectual and personal networks, connecting activists from the Nationalist Party of China or Guomindang (GMD) and beyond, even before there was the communist party. The existing network also laid a solid foundation for the formal alliance of the CCP and the GMD, a form which the Comintern ardently promoted as a workable model for Asian communist revolutions elsewhere. As H.J. Benda remarked in

1966, the dividing line between nationalism and communism was thin in much of Asia.¹³ Furthermore, it was the rapid growth of the proletariat in the big cities that enabled the left-leaning intellectuals to push their revolutionary agenda forward. Distinct from the traditional pattern in which intellectuals could only participate in politics by joining the bureaucracy, the Chinese intelligentsia was now in a position to influence politics from the outside. Through their partnership with the working class, the radical intellectuals saw the prospect of approaching China's problems via socialist solutions.

Despite the growing influence of the national capitalists and the working class, Chinese society, like other Asian colonies under the domination of the Europeans, remained overwhelmingly agrarian. In such societies, the emerging nationalist bourgeoisie was either non-existent or too weak to mobilize the masses, who were mostly peasants, to challenge the colonial regimes effectively.¹⁴ The communist movement, chiefly led by left-wing intellectuals with the participation of the urban proletariat, had no better option but to figure out viable ways to work closely with the peasantry. Unlike the semi-colonial society of China, where the confrontation with imperialism was neither direct nor acute, the colonies in Southeast Asia were under the complete control of the European powers. Consequently, the communists' best opportunity, as Khánh demonstrates in his work on Vietnam, could be found at the nexus of the existing anti-colonial or proto-nationalist patriotic movements and the anti-feudal peasant movement.¹⁵ Although communism was ideally supposed to be more "international" rather than "national," in vernacular practice it was wedded with indigenous practices. It often became a form of "folk communism."¹⁶ On the one hand, native revolutionaries adopted communism as a sort of "modernized anarchism." Such an ideology, at once utopian and millenarian, was able to attract the masses by playing a role akin to religion.¹⁷ On the other hand, as Khánh suggests, internationally oriented communism had provided two useful tools to the local anti-imperialist movements. One was intellectual, that is, interpreting local anti-colonial struggles as part of a worldwide revolutionary network; the other was psychological, that is, cultivating the belief among the natives that they were equal to the Europeans.¹⁸

Like much of China, Vietnam is virtually a mono-ethnic society with a dominant ethnic group that accounts for the overwhelming majority (more than 90 per cent) of the population. With a strong

sense of ethnic self-awareness, Vietnam's national unity was predicated on an established precolonial condition.¹⁹ Khanh identifies Vietnam's anti-colonial struggles as primarily based on its patriotic traditions rather than a rising national awareness. These patriotic traditions emphasize traditional Vietnamese social orders such as ancestor worship and the communal cult. According to Khanh, patriotism is more inward-looking, kinship-oriented, and has a sentimental connotation. The constructed (official) nationalism, by comparison, concentrates on the nation's perceived legitimate rights, and usually only exists in the political expressions of the elites. So ingrained were such traditions within Vietnamese society that anti-colonial struggles could thus be easily translated into patriotic acts or vice versa. In Vietnam's confrontation with French colonialism, indigenous elites with various political orientations could often utilize patriotic traditions to mobilize the masses to achieve their respective nationalist goals.²⁰ Radical movements, such as the one led by the communists, tended to solidify such patriotism.²¹

By contrast, in plural societies like Indonesia, where a sense of national unity was non-existent in pre-colonial history, the radical communist movement was based on a different socio-political foundation. Without an overarching ideology that could effectively unite the masses, revolutionary forces in Indonesia fighting Dutch imperialism usually followed three paths. These forces included the Pan-Islamic movement led by Muslim scholars with close connections to the Middle East, the proto-nationalist movement led by the intelligentsia who demanded a higher degree of autonomy and even independence for the colony, and the revolutionary movement brought over by the Chinese population.²² Quite unlike China and Vietnam, where revolutionary movements were primarily initiated with relatively straightforward political purposes, the early Indonesian organizations were founded not as political parties but as organizations to promote various social and cultural interests.²³ The oldest communist organization in Asia, the Indies Social Democratic Association (ISDA), the predecessor of the Communist Party of Indonesia (PKI), was first founded by European socialists.²⁴ From the outset, the internationalist outlook of the ISDA distinguished itself from the proto-nationalist organizations of the time. As McVey observes, nationalism in its infancy was attractive only to a small number of people, who were interested in pursuing an uncommitted national movement.²⁵ Pan-Islamism, by comparison, enjoyed the most substantial mass support within the

indigenous population. Such a factor contributed to the formation of the Indonesian communists' alliance with the Sarekat Islam (SI) – Indonesia's bellwether of modernist Islamic organizations with the most extensive contemporaneous network among the masses – long before the Comintern became an active proponent of the “bloc within” strategy in China.

In some communist parties, certain ethnic groups were overrepresented relative to the surrounding population. This was especially the case of Chinese and Vietnamese immigrant groups in Malaya, Siam, and Cambodia.²⁶ The emergence of this pattern had to do with two factors: firstly, the relatively early and successful communist movements in the immigrants' ethnic homelands; secondly, the demographics of these groups, which were often more politically mobilized than the resident population. The movements' anti-imperialist slogans were quite attractive to the proletarians among the immigrants, not only because they echoed egalitarian ideals in the colonies, but also because of the rise of nationalist/patriotic movements at home.²⁷ To the non-diaspora population, however, such movements were usually far less appealing, due to its membership composition and ideological persuasion. Later sections will show that while benefitting from its internationalist approach to colonial problems, communism was, because of its alien quality, vulnerable to the attacks of competing forces.

EMBRACING REVOLUTION FROM CHINA

Formally founded in 1919, the Comintern played a significant role in coordinating the dissemination of communist ideology and providing strategic guidance to communist organizations worldwide. The Comintern gained considerable prestige, at least temporarily, through the implementation of the “looking to the East” strategy in the CCP’s formative years in the early 1920s. Although the organization’s actual contribution to the rise of Chinese communism is subject to constant debates, the Comintern actively promoted the so-called Chinese model as a viable road for communist movements throughout the colonized world. Due to the obvious geographical proximity and other close connections between China and Southeast Asia, the impact of the early Chinese revolution (not limited to the communist movement) on Southeast Asia was profound. This section explores this influence from three major angles, namely (1) revolution as a transplantable model; (2) China as a center for strategizing the Southeast Asian

communist movements; and (3) the GMD and CCP as active organizers of revolution in Southeast Asia.

(1) *Revolution as a Transplantable Model*

It was probably not so difficult for Southeast Asian intellectuals to perceive the relevance of the Chinese Revolution to their own circumstances. After all, China was a non-European society with a mostly agrarian outlook. Before the emergence of world communist movements in the aftermath of the October Revolution, it was Sun Yat-sen's Xinhai Revolution of 1911, overthrowing China's last imperial dynasty, that most inspired the people of the East. As a result, Sun's socialist "Three Principles of the People" – commonly summarized as nationalism, democracy, and livelihood – gained popularity among the intellectuals seeking "teachers and techniques"²⁸

However, the acceptance of Sun's Three Principles in Southeast Asia by no means indicated that the flow of ideas was unidirectional, that is, only from China to Southeast Asia. In fact, the establishment of the ISDA predated both its Chinese counterpart and the Comintern itself. With limited exposure to international elements, the Indies communists were quite successful in adapting Marxist ideology to colonial practicalities, especially with regard to attracting a broad membership regardless of racial background. After the deportation of the key Dutch founding members, the organization went through a relatively smooth transition under its native leadership from a Marxist interest group into a full-fledged and legally recognized political party.²⁹ To survive the colonial regime's tight control, the PKI members joined the SI but still retained their communist membership. This approach coincided with Lenin's call for communist parties worldwide to build partnerships with bourgeois nationalists in their struggles against Western imperialism. Henk Sneevliet, the Dutch founder of the ISDA who later became one of the earliest Comintern representatives to China, introduced the "bloc within" strategy to the newly founded CCP, which ultimately led to the formation of the first GMD-CCP alliance between 1923 and 1927. Ironically, when the bloc within strategy was temporarily proved successful in China, the Comintern insisted that the PKI should do the same by staying inside the SI. While such an attitude had a lot to do with the heated debate between Stalin and Trotsky over the Chinese Revolution, the Comintern was apparently very unfamiliar with the changing

situation in Indonesia. Unlike its Chinese counterpart, the PKI gradually gained the upper hand in the United Front while the S.I. declined. The communists now had an opportunity to lead the Indonesian revolution instead of just participating in it.³⁰ From the Comintern perspective, however, the influence of the GMD-CCP alliance in Southeast Asia was essential. Voitinsky, the head of the Comintern's Far Eastern Bureau, wrote in 1924: "There can be no doubt that even the partial victory of Sun Yat-sen over the attempted counterrevolutions in Canton and over their instigators – the Anglo-American-French imperialists – will raise the authority of this party (GMD) in the eyes of the colonial peoples of the Pacific Ocean to a new height and will serve as a stimulant to the liberation movement of these people."³¹ The enthusiasm for the Chinese revolutionary model reached a climax during 1925–26 when the GMD National Army launched a successful military campaign against the Western-supported Chinese warlords with the help of the Soviet Union.³² The Southeast Asian communist leaders increasingly regarded the Chinese Revolution as the "center of attraction for the awakening masses of the Colonial East."³³ As McVey observed, the PKI used the events in China to demonstrate that revolution was no longer a distant European affair. "If the anti-imperialist effort could succeed in China, where the interests of so many capitalist nations were involved, then surely it could triumph in the Indies, where only the relatively weak Dutch needed to be faced."³⁴ Likewise, the Comintern also used the Indonesian movement to justify its China policy when the GMD-CCP United Front came under question towards the end of 1926. When a poorly organized revolt broke out in Java in November 1926, the Comintern conveniently related the largely homegrown event to the Chinese Revolution: "That the [Indonesian] revolt should occur just at this time, is doubtless to be attributed in no mean degree to the powerful effect produced by the recent events in China. It is the victories of the Canton army, which have strengthened the confidence of the Indonesian people in their power ... The Indonesian revolution will be victorious, just as the Chinese revolution will be victorious!"³⁵

(2) China as a Center for Strategizing Southeast Asian Communist Movements

With the success of the GMD-CCP First United Front between 1923 and 1927, China soon became a main focus of the Comintern's efforts

to initiate anti-imperialist revolutions in the Far East. As a result, the Comintern deployed a large number of agents to China and established ground offices in cities such as Guangzhou (Canton) and Shanghai. Not only did such posts become major hubs for communication between Chinese communists and the Comintern representatives, but they also served as liaison centers for the revolutions beyond China's national border. Many leaders of the early Southeast Asian communist organizations either worked at or frequently visited the Comintern organs in China. The linkages between Chinese and Southeast Asian revolutions were by no means trivial. In fact, the Comintern's China offices played a pivotal role in strategizing communist movements, which was most vividly illustrated in the cases of Indonesia and Vietnam.

The first person to develop this connection was Henk Sneevliet. As the founder of ISDA, he was forced to leave the Indies by the authorities in 1918 for inciting Indonesian workers to agitate against the Dutch colonial regime. After attending the Comintern's Second World Congress in 1920, Sneevliet was sent to China to coordinate the establishment of the CCP, and later, the formation of the first United Front between the GMD and the CCP. During his stay in China from 1921 to 1923, Sneevliet apparently maintained close contact with the Indies communist leaders. While copies of communist newspapers were continuously sent to Sneevliet, articles of the deported ISDA veterans also occasionally appeared in the major communist publications such as *Het Vrije Woord* and *Soeara Ra'jat*. Many of the Indonesian communist leaders reportedly visited Sneevliet in Shanghai en route to Moscow. As McVey observes, the contact between Shanghai and Indonesia peaked during Sneevliet's tenure. The PKI was no longer loosely connected with the rest of the communist world.³⁶

Tan Malaka was another prominent figure of the PKI who spent an extended period in China. After the Executive Committee of the Communist International (ECCI) appointed him as the supervisor to oversee the communist movements throughout Southeast Asia, Tan Malaka arrived in Guangzhou in December 1923, where he chaired the labour office of the Comintern for over a year. Like Sneevliet in Shanghai, Tan Malaka was able to send his directives to the PKI from abroad thanks to the ease of communications among Asia's port cities.³⁷ In June 1924, the Pacific Transport Workers Conference convened in Guangzhou in the hope of "catalyzing the development of the movement among a group of workers most susceptible to radical

organizations and also improving international connections in the area.”³⁸ Alimin and Budisutjitro joined Tan Malaka to represent the PKI at the conference. Although the Guangzhou Bureau was ultimately abandoned in 1925, Tan Malaka played a critical role in connecting the labour movements in the Far East during his stay in China.

Interestingly, there was a period in 1924–25 when the PKI had two overseas bases led by its two prominent leaders: the European PKI office led by Semaun and the Guangzhou office headed by Tan Malaka. The two offices “had virtually no direct contact” with each other besides the Comintern channel in Moscow.³⁹ However, when the Dutch communists proposed to shut down the base in Guangzhou, Semaun insisted that both the Dutch and Guangzhou connections were crucial. Guangzhou was important because there were a large number of ethnic Chinese proletarians in Indonesia whom the PKI should bring under its influence.⁴⁰ As the colonial government carried out more stringent measures against communism, Darsono, a PKI representative in Moscow in early 1926, proposed to organize the Indonesian movement in China: “We would like to have a party conference called somewhere abroad, preferably in China ... By organizing some sort of a center in China which will strengthen the Party Central Committee inside the country [sic], because when the comrades feel that they have a party leadership outside they will be more enthusiastic and the situation will be improved.”⁴¹

A similar pattern was also evident in the more successful case of Vietnam. Disillusioned with reformism and Wilsonian idealism in the early twentieth century, Nguyen Ai Quoc (Ho Chi Minh), the most prominent figure in the Vietnamese communist movement, was exposed to Marxist theories during his stay in Paris in the early 1920s.⁴² In 1924, Nguyen Ai Quoc came to China from Moscow with a vision of launching two revolutions in Vietnam: a political one that aimed to fight for national independence and a social one targeted at returning the land to the tiller.⁴³ Primarily based on the organizational structure of Tam Tam Xa, a group of Vietnamese quasi-intellectuals living in southern China, Nguyen Ai Quoc established the Communist Youth Corps (CYC) and its mass organization the Vietnamese Revolutionary Youth Association (*Thanh Nien*, or Youth) in Guangzhou. The *Thanh Nien* headquarters in Guangzhou served as the single most important center for Vietnamese revolutionary activities from 1925 to 1927. The offices had a wide variety of functions, which included hosting revolutionaries, organizing theoretical

and practical training, publishing propaganda and educational materials, and planning clandestine activities.⁴⁴ Within two years *Thanh Nien* had developed into a full-fledged communist organization. Although the GMD-CCP split in 1927 led to the inevitable destruction of the Vietnamese communist headquarters in Guangzhou, there was little doubt that *Thanh Nien* laid a solid foundation for the development of the Vietnamese communist revolution. As Khanh noted: "In 1925 Marxism-Leninism was only one of many political theories, including those of Gandhi, Sun Yat-sen, Piłsudski, introduced to Vietnam; by the end of 1927, it had become a leading ideology with an organizational home. From that time on, communism remained an integral part of Vietnamese nationalism."⁴⁵

(3) *The GMD and CCP Activities in Southeast Asia*

The Chinese Revolution of the early 1920s appeared "communist" in the international arena despite the more dominant role of the nationalists. The Comintern's deep involvement in the Chinese Revolution, exemplified by the bloc within strategy that encouraged the CCP to work within the GMD's organizational framework, was among the many factors contributing to such an impression. With Moscow's support, the GMD-led Chinese National Army made successful military advances against the northern warlords, which generated a robust revolutionary momentum from 1923–27. As soon as the GMD-CCP alliance collapsed in 1927, however, the GMD purged CCP members relentlessly in the following years. The CCP's very survival was placed in jeopardy. Given the chaotic political situation in China and the relatively limited strength of the CCP in the years before the Second World War, the degree to which the CCP penetrated into Southeast Asia as an independent organization – rather than as a faction within the GMD-CCP alliance – was questionable. By contrast, with its extensive overseas network inherited from its predecessor *Tongmenghui*, the GMD spearheaded the dissemination of China's revolutionary ideologies all across Southeast Asia. As Grigory Voitinsky, the head of the Comintern's Far Eastern Bureau, wrote in 1924: "The news of the reorganization of the GMD has penetrated into the French colony of Indochina, the American colony of the Philippines, the Dutch colony of the Malay Archipelago, reached Singapore, Malaya, and India. At the Pacific Transport Workers' Conference in Guangzhou in June of this year delegations from almost

all these areas saluted the GMD, although to some extent they tended to idealize its program and activities.”⁴⁶ With rare exceptions, such penetrations were often carried out through the channels of overseas Chinese in areas where the latter were numerous. Such efforts were consistent with the GMD’s nationalist approach to winning over the hearts and minds of the overseas Chinese. The practice was made possible by China’s nationality law, which followed the principle of *jus sanguinis* (right of blood). According to this principle, “every legal or extra-legal child of a Chinese father or mother, regardless of birth-place” would be automatically regarded as a Chinese citizen.⁴⁷ Consequently, while new immigrants to Southeast Asia remained Chinese citizens, those locally born (possessing a citizenship other than Chinese) also had the right to reclaim their Chinese nationality. As McVey notes, “the presence of a large and rapidly expanding Chinese minority in Indonesia naturally had considerable bearing on the usefulness of the Chinese example to the PKI.” The Chinese community in the Indies “had supported the GMD from its beginnings and followed the revolution with great interest.”⁴⁸

The CCP, unable to export a “revolutionary model” of its own, was more active in establishing communist organizations appealing to the overseas Chinese community, especially in places where substantial native-led communist movements were non-existent. Malaya and Siam are two typical cases that reflect such a pattern. Local communist branches such as the Siamese Overseas Chinese Communist Party and the South Seas Communist Party were founded in Siam and Malaya respectively, both in 1927, under the auspices of the CCP.⁴⁹ In Cambodia, the participants in the country’s early communist movements were also predominantly Chinese and Vietnamese.⁵⁰ Although these communist organizations often hoped to attract supporters regardless of ethnic background, they soon developed their strongest mass support in the immigrant communities. In their attempts to reach out to non-Chinese communities, the “Chinese” outlook would almost always supersede the organizations’ class-based “communist” inclinations. While working at the Comintern’s Far Eastern Bureau, Nguyen Ai Quoc criticized the CCP cadres in Malaya for being “out of touch with the real mass elements,” as the latter “failed to recruit other races besides Chinese.”⁵¹ The CCP cadres faced many difficulties, such as language barriers, in attracting non-Chinese followers.⁵² Beyond such practical problems, the problem was closely intertwined with many socio-economic issues caused by the colony’s ingrained

racial segregation. According to Tan Malaka, Chinese people in Malaya were politically more aware and had a better understanding of the economic situation because of their greater exposure to commercial activities in the urban environment.⁵³ Additionally, “being Chinese” and “being proletarian” often appeared incompatible to locally born populations, which made the overwhelmingly “Chinese” communist party unappealing.

Due to the GMD’s nationwide purge of CCP members, many Chinese communists fled to Southeast Asia after 1927. The 1930s saw a rapid growth of clandestine communist activities in spite of the tight surveillance of the colonial regimes. As a result of the Japanese aggression in China, the rise of Chinese nationalism provided a favourable condition for the China-oriented communist movements overseas. In Malaya, for instance, the communists gained substantial support by actively participating in the National Salvation Movement. The party established numerous open and underground organizations that aimed not only to recruit new members but also to exert broader influence to the diaspora community under the banner of fighting against the Japanese.⁵⁴ As Cheah put it, “the Malayan Communist Party (MCP) had become a paradox – an Overseas Chinese party oriented toward China and the CCP but trying to lead a Communist revolution in the multiracial society of Malaya.”⁵⁵

RESISTING CHINESENESS IN VARIOUS FORMS OF NATIONALISM

In spite of its internationalist character, communist revolution in Southeast Asia often took a nationalist route.⁵⁶ While nationalist discourse commonly associates struggles for independence with fighting against foreign domination, communists often take more radical approaches against foreign capitalists’ exploitation of the indigenous population. “Foreignness” is a highly slippery concept. Its interpretation, therefore, is constantly subject to political manipulation. The controversies over the presence of the Chinese are no doubt integral to the identity politics of Southeast Asia. At the risk of oversimplifying, the Chinese are simultaneously victims (along with the home-grown population) of Western domination and beneficiaries of processes of colonization, through which the Chinese gained a relatively superior economic position. They are, paradoxically, both colonizers and anti-colonialists.

There were two principal reasons for the rise of resistance to Chineseness. Firstly, in plural societies such as Indonesia and Malaya, the Chinese account for a (sizable) minority of the total people. Chinese are commonly stereotyped as exploiters of the locally-raised population. As a result, rejecting Chineseness in nationalist movements was an indispensable part of the agenda of anti-colonialism itself. Secondly, the Chinese presence has also been quite strong in largely mono-ethnic societies such as Vietnam and Siam due to the geographical proximity. The resistance against the Chinese offers a useful way of stimulating anti-imperialist patriotism; such resistance is also essential to the processes of identity-making that lead to the formation of nation-states. It is also worth noting that there are no clear dividing lines between the two patterns. Various forms of resistance against the Chinese and “Chineseness” are often closely connected. While communism was adapted to suit political needs in distinct local contexts, the intricate inter- and intra-racial networks further complicated its dissemination, which added irresolvable contradictions to the anti-imperialist struggles across Southeast Asia.

(1) *The Dilemma of Overseas Chinese*

While the Chinese Revolution appealed to Southeast Asian communists, they were not thereby committed to embracing the Chinese model wholeheartedly. Admittedly, the Chinese Revolution was particularly inspiring to the Southeast Asian communists as it served as evidence that Marxism-Leninism could work in non-European contexts and largely agrarian societies. In the meantime, however, the fact that the success of the revolution belonged to “the Chinese” made communism less attractive to some of the indigenous population. After all, “the communist paradise so close at hand is a *Chinese* paradise.”⁵⁷

In the Dutch East Indies, the PKI leadership was reluctant to develop a working relationship with the Indies Chinese community, which was considered economically well-off and ideologically attracted to communism because of the ongoing revolution in China. Understandably, the PKI would enjoy enormous benefits if it succeeded in bringing Indies Chinese under its influence. However, the PKI also feared that its close association with the Chinese would jeopardize the party’s mass support, especially in rural areas where the Chinese were often stereotypically seen as ruthless moneylenders or exploitative

businesspeople.⁵⁸ Although the PKI eventually pursued an implicit policy of working with the Chinese, their connections remained weak throughout the first phase of the party's existence before the colonial government crushed it in 1927.⁵⁹ Admittedly, excluding the Indies Chinese from the PKI activities would go against the party's non-ethnicity-based Marxist ideology. Beyond the pure ideological consideration, however, it was the prospect of drawing material support from the Chinese business community that propelled the PKI to make such a move. Furthermore, the PKI leadership believed that the Indies Chinese press, with its sympathetic view of the local revolution, would be useful for propaganda purposes.⁶⁰ The PKI appointed Chinese executive members to represent some of the party divisions and recruited Chinese workers to its affiliated unions. It also launched campaigns to show its moral support for the Chinese Revolution and to provide symbolic financial aid to China's disaster relief efforts.⁶¹ The party leadership hoped, vainly as it turned out, to receive mutual support from the Indies Chinese community.⁶² So China-oriented were most of the Indies Chinese that the level of enthusiasm for participating in a radical Indonesian revolution within the Chinese community was low. Only a handful joined the party, while the majority opted to stay out of the movement. Many of the Chinese spurned any involvement in the domestic politics of the Indies. It might endanger their business and livelihood under the strict Dutch surveillance.⁶³

Akin to the DEI case in which the communist party mainly comprised the locally born, parties with predominantly Chinese membership faced similar difficulties in building a mass base that could stretch beyond ethnic boundaries. As mentioned earlier, the CCP facilitated the establishment of some Southeast Asian communist parties under the tutelage of the Comintern. With their Chinese outlook, such organizations were usually efficient in obtaining mass support within the overseas Chinese community but were not successful in influencing the non-Chinese population. A striking example of this pattern is the communist movement in British Malaya. The CCP cadres penetrated into the colony – with its vast community ties to the Chinese mainland – with relative ease, and quickly established an organizational framework. After the completion of this groundwork, however, the Malayan communists found themselves struggling with an unresolvable dilemma, namely the incompatibility of various streams of anti-colonialist nationalism. The MCP's membership primarily consisted of the overseas Chinese, more preoccupied with the liberation of China

than the independence of Malaya. Catalyzed by the Japanese aggression in China, the nationalist movement of the diaspora community reached its peak in the 1930s. Meanwhile, the Malay and Indian communities had their own definitions of national liberation. Besides a vaguely articulated anti-British imperialism, there was an absence in Malaya of a necessary ideological common ground upon which a national unity could be achieved. Communism, now appearing to be overwhelmingly Chinese, was not attractive enough in the ethnically segregated plural society of Malaya. Although the MCP soon noticed the situation and did make attempts to bridge this ethnic division in its recruiting, its inability to distinguish loyalty to China from loyalty to Malaya hampered its efforts to make meaningful changes.⁶⁴ It was not until the eve of the Japanese invasion in 1940 that the “All-Races Democratic United Front” was finally established. Unsurprisingly, however, the organization failed to make any visible change to Malaya’s intrinsically ethnicity-based political environment.

(2) Resistance against the Chinese and the Identity-Making Process in Nationalist Movements

Anti-colonialism, or the resistance against foreign domination in general, often traces its origin to a specific place’s precolonial past. With the rise of nationalist sentiment in the colonies, the discourse of the precolonial past became relevant again to people’s imagination about national liberation. Such imagination, as Benedict Anderson famously noted in *Imagined Communities*, is essential to the identity-making process that leads to the formation of nation-states.⁶⁵ Anti-imperialist struggles against the Europeans thus curiously paralleled other forms of anti-foreign resistance that existed in the discourse of the pre-colonial period. Historically, the Chinese presence in Southeast Asia has been robust and lasting, which inevitably lead to the existence of a sort of patriotism based on anti-Chinese traditions. While Southeast Asian nationalists obtained inspiration from the Chinese Revolution, non-communist forces were wary of the danger of a radicalism they associated with “Chineseness.” Within communist groups, too, besides embracing the Chinese revolutionary models, there was also a tendency to reject the Chinese influence by adopting more radical approaches. Such paradoxes were most evident in Siam and Vietnam, where the dominant top-down “official nationalism” played a critical role in resisting “Chineseness.”⁶⁶

As in Malaya, the followers of early Thai communist movement were also predominantly overseas Chinese. Due to the general lack of interest in Marxist ideology among the Western-educated elites, it was primarily the immigrant groups, rather than the Western-educated intellectuals, who introduced communism into the country.⁶⁷ Moreover, as conservative royalist elites monopolized the cultural and political life of the country, they were able to “put up a double-layered cultural resistance to foreign radical ideas through the conservative ethno-ideology of Thainess and the anti-socialist hegemony of the ancient Thai utopias.”⁶⁸ Consequently, the emergence of anti-communism ironically predated the spread of communism.⁶⁹ The royalists occupied a privileged vantage point in defining pure “Thainess,” an essentialist nationalist stance designed not to fight against colonialists or neighbours, but to resist the growing Chinese influence in the first half of the twentieth century.⁷⁰ As a result, communism, imbued with a strong sense of “Chineseness,” became increasingly regarded as being “non-Thai.” However, a group of Lookjin (Thai-born Chinese) communists gradually bridged the gap between the foreign Marxist-communist ideology and the Thai people. This was not only made possible by their successful efforts at translating Chinese communist publications into the Thai language; the process also involved the Lookjin communists’ thorough conversion – linguistically, occupationally, and socially – to “Thainess.”⁷¹ The Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) at its inception also encountered difficulties in attracting non-Chinese followers, which was similar to the problem facing their Malayan counterparts. However, they managed to overcome this problem by integrating themselves into the orbit of the indigenous Thai cultural system – in other words, by eliminating “Chineseness” from communism. The new version of communism was able to survive the government’s strict surveillance and harsh repression over time under the guise of Thai culture.⁷²

The elimination of “Chineseness,” albeit following a different pattern, also took place in the Vietnamese communist movement. According to Khánh, an important feature that distinguished the Vietnamese revolution from other parts of Southeast Asia was the notion of patriotism. Patriotism is distinct from the typical form of nationalism mainly because of its strong sense of ethnic self-awareness, which already existed in the pre-colonial era. Such patriotism tended to emphasize the traditional Vietnamese social order, which included both a form of ancestor worship reminiscent of that of the Chinese

and a native form of communalism.⁷³ Although the term “patriotism” did not appear in the Vietnamese language until the turn of the twentieth century, ethnic self-awareness was well grounded in Vietnamese pride in “pursuing a political destiny separate from that of China.” Anti-Chinese figures in historical discourse were highly regarded.⁷⁴ Therefore, “defeating the superior Chinese” constituted an integral part of the Vietnamese patriotic tradition. The elimination of Chineseness, or more precisely, demarcations from Chinese models, was important in Vietnamese anti-colonial struggles. Such demarcations included those separating the French-educated intelligentsia from the Chinese-educated Confucian gentry; the reformers from the French collaborators; the radicals in southern China from the gradualists; and so on. As the revolution became increasingly radical, the new generations always managed to find original paths compatible with local circumstances. This pattern is best illustrated in the party reorganization in the aftermath of the *Thanh Nien* disintegration, which could be partially attributed to the GMD repression of the Chinese communists after the breakup of the GMD-CCP alliance. A schism emerged within the Vietnamese communist movement, as the young communists criticized the older generation for not being revolutionary enough. With the decline of the China-based leadership, the younger generation in Vietnam started to steer the party’s political priority away from national independence and towards European-style class struggles.⁷⁵ To a large extent, this shift of focus showed that the Vietnamese communist movement had transformed itself from something derivative of the Chinese Revolution into an entirely self-run project. As Benda remarks, the “homegrown” Vietnamese revolution is among the most impressive communist movements, as evident in its growing independence from “communist monolithism.” As he remarks, “the ‘best’ communists are obviously nobody’s puppet.”⁷⁶

CONCLUSION

In his 1956 essay on Southeast Asian communism, Benda points out that postwar scholarly writings tended to overemphasize Chinese leadership and the Chinese communist model in Southeast Asia, partially because of the CCP victory over the GMD in 1949, which “heightened its prestige.”⁷⁷ Although it is debatable whether Benda’s claim is still valid today given the sea changes over the past six decades, the themes of “Chinese leadership” and the “Chinese communist

model” remain relevant to the discussions of Southeast Asian communist movements. By comparing Siam, British Malaya, French Indochina, and the Dutch East Indies, this chapter shows that the representations of China, Chinese, and Chineseness in the origins of Southeast Asian communist movements vary drastically from one another (see figure 11.1).

First, the Chinese Revolution is a natural frame of reference for anti-imperialist struggles in Southeast Asia. Keen to resist foreign domination, the new generation of Asian radicals considered communist theories. Thanks to their greater access to Western education, many intellectuals approached national liberation through socialist struggles. With the success of the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917, Marxism-Leninism started to exert a profound influence all over the world, which inevitably ignited anti-imperialist enthusiasm in the East. China was among the first countries in Asia to receive this impact and graft it on to the country’s nationalist movement. Revolutionary Leninism was gradually accepted as the standard form of communism in Asia, as it effectively provided both theoretical guidance and organizational strategies for fledgling communist movements in societies in which capitalism had not yet fully developed.

Secondly, China was a major source of revolution that the Southeast Asian communists could embrace. As a non-European and largely agrarian society, China shared many similarities with Southeast Asia in terms of politics, social structure, and cultural values. The achievements of the Chinese Revolution, especially those characterizing the years of the First GMD-CCP United Front under Comintern tutelage, were both inspirational and instructive to Southeast Asian radicals desperately in search of viable paths for their own movements. The Chinese Revolution served as a potentially transplantable model in the eyes of Southeast Asian communists; it strengthened their belief that communism could work. As the Comintern paid close attention to the Chinese Revolution, China also functioned as a hub of communication and a center for strategizing Southeast Asian revolutions. Many Southeast Asian communist leaders either worked at or frequented the Comintern offices in China, which provided vital connections to the rise of communist movements in their home countries. To win over the hearts and minds of the vast overseas Chinese population, many GMD and CCP organizations managed to expand in Southeast Asia. However, their inability to work beyond ethnic boundaries constrained the level of influence that such branches could exert.

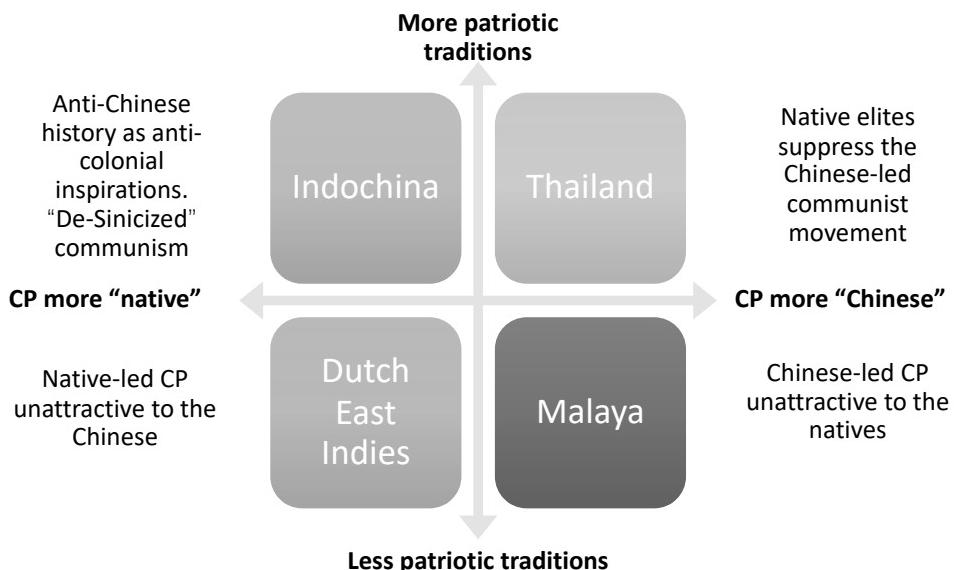


Figure 11.1

Finally, the notion of Chineseness was extremely ambiguous in the Southeast Asian context. The rise of communism further complicated this situation. Communists necessarily worked with various contradictions inherent to the unique economic and socio-political positions of the overseas Chinese. On the one hand, the native-led communist movements were reluctant to absorb Chinese followers, as the latter's bourgeois image could endanger the former's mass base in the proletariat and the peasantry. On the other hand, the Chinese-led communist movements also had enormous difficulties in attracting participants beyond the Chinese community, since such movements were usually imbued with a strong sense of nationalism oriented towards China. Moreover, resistance against the Chinese influence has been an integral part of the Southeast Asian discourse of patriotism and official nationalism. Due to the "Chinese" outlook of the communist movement, anti-communism was essential to the royalty-monopolized identity-making process of Thainess in Siam. In Vietnam, by comparison, the young communists' departure from the "Chinese revolutionary model" was not only critical to the party's sustainable development but also consistent with Vietnamese patriotic traditions, in which anti-Chinese struggles were central to the formation of the Vietnamese national awareness.

Primarily written on the basis of nation-states, the Cold War scholarship on Southeast Asian communism often pays little attention to movements crossing geographical and political boundaries. Among the handful of books that engage in comparative studies, historical depth has sometimes been compromised.⁷⁸ Is it possible to study the rise of Southeast Asian communism comparatively under an overarching theme? Christopher Goscha's work on the Southeast Asian networks of the Vietnamese revolution presents a possible new direction. In the same vein, issues surrounding "Chineseness," rather than just the Chinese networks, are worthy of more careful investigations. While scholars have laid solid foundations in the fields of communism, nationalism, and Chinese diaspora studies in Southeast Asia, many important questions remain unanswered. For instance, why was communism, in theory based around class, in practice so often framed by race, religion, and cultural resentment? Why did the native-led communist movements fail to converge with the ones led by the Chinese? Generally speaking, Southeast Asia has been receptive to foreign influences throughout history. While many world religions have found ample spaces to thrive, why has communism been so thoroughly eradicated with only a few exceptions (and what about the exceptions)? There remain many conundrums to grapple with in the complicated and contentious history of communism in Southeast Asia.

NOTES

- 1 Harry Benda, "Communism in Southeast Asia," in *Continuity and Change in Southeast Asia* (New Haven: Yale University Southeast Asia Studies, 1972), 51–2.
- 2 Allen Chun, "Fuck Chineseness: On the Ambiguities of Ethnicity as Culture as Identity," *boundary 2* 23, no. 2 (1996): 111.
- 3 Ien Ang, "Can One Say No to Chineseness? Pushing the Limits of the Diasporic Paradigm," *boundary 2* 25, no. 3 (1998): 225.
- 4 Chun, "Fuck Chineseness," 124.
- 5 Philip Kuhn, *Chinese among Others: Emigration in Modern Times* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2008), 4.
- 6 Tu Wei-ming, "Cultural China: The Periphery as the Center," *Daedalus* 120, no. 2 (1991): 1–32.
- 7 For a more detailed discussion of such kinds of view held by social democrats, see McVey's analysis of H. van Kol, the leader of the Dutch Social

- Democratic Workers' Party (SDAP). Ruth McVey, *The Rise of Indonesian Communism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1965), 4.
- 8 Ibid., 1–4.
- 9 Arif Dirlik, *The Origins of Chinese Communism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 10–11.
- 10 Ibid., 11.
- 11 Ibid., 255.
- 12 Ibid., 269–70.
- 13 Harry Benda, “Reflection on Asian Communism,” in *Continuity and Change in Southeast Asia* (New Haven: Yale University Southeast Asia Studies, 1972), 261.
- 14 The nationalist movement led by the urban bourgeoisie did gain considerable strength over the following years, especially during the period of Japanese occupation. As this chapter mainly concerns the origin of the prewar period, the analysis here does not include a detailed discussion of such movements.
- 15 Huỳnh Kim Khanh, *Vietnamese Communism, 1925–1945* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), 23.
- 16 Benda, “Reflection on Asian Communism,” 260.
- 17 Ibid., 259.
- 18 Khanh, *Vietnamese Communism*, 55.
- 19 Ibid., 32.
- 20 Ibid., 27.
- 21 Ibid., 34.
- 22 First published in 1913, Lenin’s “The Awakening in Asia” refers to a “Chinese revolutionary movement” that was most likely the Xinhai Revolution in 1911, which overthrew China’s last imperial dynasty, the Qing. Also see McVey, *The Rise of Indonesian Communism*, 7.
- 23 Ibid., 22.
- 24 The ISDA was founded by Dutch socialist Henk Sneevliet in 1914.
- 25 McVey, *The Rise of Indonesian Communism*, 64.
- 26 See Christopher Goscha, *Thailand and the Southeast Asian Networks of the Vietnamese Revolution, 1885–1954* (Richmond: Curzon Press, 1999), 64–96; Anna Belogurova, “The Chinese International of Nationalities: The Chinese Communist Party, the Comintern, and the Foundation of the Malayan National Communist Party, 1923–1939,” *Journal of Global History* 9, no. 3 (2014): 447.
- 27 Although technically Thailand was never a formal colony, it had many similar experiences in its confrontation with European colonialism. See Thongchai Winichakul, *Siam Mapped: A History of the Geo-Body of a*

- Nation* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2009); Tamara Loos, *Subject Siam: Family, Law, and Colonial Modernity in Thailand* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006).
- 28 Khanh, *Vietnamese Communism*, 36, 53.
- 29 The Dutch colonial authority's attitude towards the Indies communist party was quite ambivalent. While recognizing the party's legality, the colonial government also kept a tight surveillance on the communist activities. The leaders of the communist organization were constantly subject to arrest, investigation, and banishment. For more detailed analysis, see McVey, *The Rise of Indonesian Communism*, xii.
- 30 Ibid., 83.
- 31 Ibid., 224.
- 32 The Northern Expedition officially started July 1926. Although Chiang Kai-shek, the leader of the GMD after Sun Yat-sen's death, already begun to double his party alliance with the communists, the First United Front did not break up until 1927. By defeating the Northern warlords, the Northern Expedition ultimately reunified China in 1928.
- 33 McVey, *The Rise of Indonesian Communism*, 350.
- 34 Ibid., 229.
- 35 Semaun, "The Rebellion in the Dutch East Indies," *International Press Correspondence*, 2 December 1926, 1438, as quoted in McVey, *The Rise of Indonesian Communism*, 350. Interestingly, the PKI's official history of the 1960s talked about the influence of the Chinese Revolution in a very different fashion. Instead of giving credit to the Comintern policy, the author emphasizes the Indies Chinese, who actually did not play a big role in the Indonesian revolution until much later: "The surging revolution in China, namely the Northern Expedition of the Revolutionary Army from Canton with the aim of defeating the warlords, exerted impact on the movement in Indonesia through the democratic-minded Chinese people there. The Indies Chinese thereby participated in the revolution and the struggles for independence in Indonesia." See Partai Komunis Indonesia (PKI), *Pemberontakan nasional pertama di Indonesia, 1926* (*The First Nationalist Uprising of Indonesia, 1926*) (Djakarta: Jajasan Pembaruan, 1961), 47.
- 36 McVey, *The Rise of Indonesian Communism*, 203.
- 37 Ibid., 210.
- 38 Ibid., 216.
- 39 Ibid., 214.
- 40 "Report of Comrade Darsono to India Sub-Secretariat," 6 May 1926, in Partai Komunis Indonesia, and Komintern (PKI), Archief Komintern

– Partai Komunis Indonesia (AKPKI), Folder 2, ARCHOI744, International Institute of Social History (IISH), Amsterdam, Netherlands.

- 41 “Questions and answers to Comrade Darsana’s Report,” 6 May 1926, in PKI, AKPKI, Folder 2, ARCHOI744, IISH.
- 42 Sophie Quinn-Judge, *Ho Chi Minh: The Missing Years: 1919–1941* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 42.
- 43 Khanh, *Vietnamese Communism*, 64.
- 44 Ibid., 66–8.
- 45 Ibid., 88.
- 46 Voitinsky, “The Kuomintang and the Communist Party in the Struggle with Imperialism,” *Novyi Vostok*, no. 6, 1924: xxvi. See McVey, *The Rise of Indonesian Communism*, 224.
- 47 The Qing Dynasty enacted China’s first nationality law in 1909 but was overthrown in 1911; however, the new nationalist government adopted its 1909 nationality law and retained the principle of *jus sanguinis*. In 1929, the GMD regime passed a new law on citizenship, which reaffirmed the principle of *jus sanguinis*. The Chinese nationality law conflicted with the laws of many colonial states, which followed the principle of *jus soli* (right of soil). In the case of the Dutch East Indies, although the two sides signed the Consular Convention of 1911 which limited the jurisdiction of Chinese consuls, the ambiguities over the national status of the local-born Chinese remained till the early independent period. See Donald Willmott, *The National Status of the Chinese in Indonesia, 1900–1958* (Ithaca: Modern Indonesia Project, Southeast Asia Program, Department of Far Eastern Studies, Cornell University, 1961), 30–3.
- 48 McVey, *The Rise of Indonesian Communism*, 224.
- 49 For the origin of Siamese communism, see Kasian Têchaphira, *Commodifying Marxism: The Formation of Modern Thai Radical Culture, 1927–1958* (Kyoto: Kyoto University Press, 2001), 22; for the establishment of the South Seas Communist Party, see Cheah Boon Kheng, *From PKI to the Comintern, 1924–1941: The Apprenticeship of the Malayan Communist Party; Selected Documents and Discussion* (Ithaca: Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University, 1992), 14.
- 50 See Ben Kiernan, *How Pol Pot Came to Power: Colonialism, Nationalism, and Communism in Cambodia, 1930–1975* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 8; Goscha, *Thailand and the Southeast Asian Networks of the Vietnamese Revolution*, 83–8.
- 51 Cheah, *From PKI to the Comintern*, 15.
- 52 Belogurova, “The Chinese International of Nationalities,” 46.

- 53 "Tan Malaka on Communism in Malaya, 1925," in *Malayan Bulletin of Political Intelligence*, October 1926, CO 273/535, the National Archives (TNA), London. Also see Cheah, *From PKI to the Comintern*, 50–1.
- 54 Akashi Yōji, *The Nanyang Chinese National Salvation Movement, 1937–1941* (Lawrence: Center for East Asian Studies, University of Kansas, 1970), 20–1.
- 55 Cheah, *From PKI to the Comintern*, 40.
- 56 Kiernan, *How Pol Pot Came to Power*, xx.
- 57 Benda, "Communism in Southeast Asia," 61.
- 58 McVey, *The Rise of Indonesian Communism*, 225.
- 59 The PKI leaders in Moscow addressed the importance of working with the Indies Chinese several times in early 1926, but such a policy had never been sufficiently implemented as the party was already in deep crisis due to the authorities' crackdown. The failed revolt at the turn of 1926 and 1927 further exacerbated the situation, which led to the party's final collapse. For the Comintern discussions on working with the Indies Chinese, see Alimin, "Discussion at the Meeting of the Indonesian Sub-Secretariat," 29 July 1926, in PKI, AKPKI, Folder 2, ARCHOI744, IISH.
- 60 Alimin, "Discussion at the Meeting of the Indonesian Sub-Secretariat."
- 61 "Report of Comrade Darsono to India Sub-Secretariat," 6 May 1926, in PKI, AKPKI, Folder 2, ARCHOI744, IISH.
- 62 McVey, *The Rise of Indonesian Communism*, 226–7.
- 63 Ibid., 229.
- 64 Cheah, *From PKI to the Comintern*, 31.
- 65 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2006), 9–36.
- 66 Contrary to the top-down "official nationalism" which is usually defined by the ruling elites, there is also what Benedict Anderson called vernacular nationalism, which is constructed bottom-up through means such as modern education system or print media, etc. See also Kiernan, *How Pol Pot Came to Power*, xiv.
- 67 Kasian, *Commodifying Marxism*, 6.
- 68 Ibid., 3.
- 69 Ibid., 13.
- 70 Kasian argues that the Thai version of official nationalism was not racism per se but an ethnicizing discourse. Ibid., 16, 189.
- 71 Ibid., 24–5.
- 72 Ibid., 199.
- 73 Khanh, *Vietnamese Communism*, 27.

- 74 Ibid., 28.
- 75 Ibid., 114–15.
- 76 Benda, “Reflection on Asian Communism,” 255.
- 77 Benda, “Communism in Southeast Asia,” 59.
- 78 Examples include: Justus Maria van der Kroef, *Communism in South-East Asia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980); Colin Mackerras and Nick Knight, *Marxism in Asia* (New York: St Martin’s Press, 1985); Jack Henry Brimmell, *Communism in South East Asia: A Political Analysis* (London: Oxford University Press, 1959); Frank N. Trager, *Marxism in Southeast Asia: A Study of Four Countries* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1959).

PART FOUR

National Questions

“Young” and “Adult” Canadian Communists

The Question of Nationhood and Ethnicity in the 1920s

Daria Dyakonova

Historian Ian Angus argues that the Canadian communist movement “was not smuggled into the country by Russian agents” but was created by long-time socialist and working class militants.¹ These militants, both young and adult, admired the international’s wisdom and experience. But they also believed they themselves knew how to fight for both immediate workers’ demands and ultimate revolutionary goals. Throughout the interwar period they would most often adopt Moscow’s policies, but sometimes, depending on local circumstances, amend and even oppose them. At times they also proposed new strategies, some of which the international would find relevant.

This chapter proposes a new reading of the centre-periphery relations as far as the Canadian case in concerned. For a long time, the core theme has been the domination by the Comintern’s apparatus in Moscow (the centre) of national communist parties (the periphery).² Based partly on the documents of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) and the Communist Party of Canada (CPC), and specifically on the archives of the Young Communist League (YCL), this chapter will put particular emphasis on the relations between the CPC and the YCL, which were at times difficult and even antagonistic. The youth/adult rivalry both complicated and enriched communists’ policies on such issues as Canadian independence, the status of French Canadians, and the rights of linguistic (or ethnic) groups within the party and the league.

THE ADULTS AND THE YOUTH WITHIN THE CANADIAN COMMUNIST MOVEMENT

The Communist Party of Canada was founded in 1921 as a section of the Comintern. In 1922 the young people within the movement founded an organization for youth and children – the Young Workers' League, renamed the Young Communist League in February 1923 – as a section of the Young Communist International (YCI). The league was open to young people of both sexes between the ages of fifteen (later fourteen) and twenty-three. Its junior organization, the Young Pioneers, was open to boys and girls between eight (later ten) and fourteen years of age.³

In its constitution, the YCL stressed its political submission to the CPC, combined, however, with organizational independence. The constitution also provided for mutual representation at all levels. Cooperation thus was encouraged, although the league was still to retain its separate youth identity, as its specific spheres of work were often different from those of the party.⁴ In fact, during the whole interwar period, most leading league organizers were also party members. Although sometimes they were too young for membership, an exception was made for them for the sake of league-party unity.

In reality, the league-party relationship was not as easy as the one implied by the description in the YCL's constitution. As was the case with many other sections of the YCI, including the Soviet YCL (*Komsomol*), the Canadian league often opposed certain party policies. The youngsters often emphasized their avant-garde character and more pronounced revolutionary spirit. In fact, the league competed with the party and used every opportunity to highlight its superiority. Indeed, in some regions, as one YCL organizer stated in 1925, "it was hard to tell whether the League supported the Party or the Party supported the League, so effective and aggressive was the role of the League."⁵

In the 1920s the party had a tendency to understand party-league cooperation as a one-way movement: it tried to influence the league and impose its decisions upon it. The league resisted and looked for party support rather than party guidance. In a way, the league's position was more autonomous than that of the party. The party was subordinate to the Comintern. The league, as spelled out in its constitution, was subject to a double subordination – to the CPC on the one hand and to the YCI on the other. Moreover, in 1921 the

Comintern had granted Youth Leagues the right to appeal directly to the Comintern’s Executive in case of “serious differences” with particular parties. Having several masters thus vested YCLers with more freedom to manoeuvre. Often, especially in late 1920s, the league would play this “multiple masters card” in conflicts with the party, including those concerning ethnicity and nationhood.

COMMUNISM AND ETHNICITY: BOLSHEVIZATION OR CANADIANIZATION?

From the moment of the CPC’s foundation, the Ukrainian and Finnish socialist organizations, or language federations as they were often called, constituted the bulk of its membership. A Jewish language federation was also formed in 1924. In April 1922, in a report to the Presidium of the Comintern, the Central Executive Committee of the CPC pointed out the importance of Finnish, Ukrainian, Jewish, Lithuanian, and Russian groups, adding that about 80 per cent of the CPC members could not speak English.⁶

The YCL’s leadership acknowledged a similar situation. The league was extremely decentralized and counted several relatively autonomous and linguistically defined sections. It too was mainly composed of the Ukrainian, Finnish, and Jewish youth sections. In 1929, the league was able to give the precise percentage for each section: 55 per cent of the members were of Finnish parentage; 23 per cent of Ukrainian parentage; 16 per cent of Jewish parentage; and a mere 6 per cent of Anglo-Saxon origin.⁷ French Canadians were almost non-existent in the league. Indigenous Canadians were hardly ever mentioned in party or league documents in the 1920s. In other words, the Young Communists were mostly immigrants or “recent” Canadians. The language barrier was therefore an important hindrance to the league’s activities. For example, in April 1924, its Finnish organizations complained about the difficulty of corresponding with the party’s leaders in English. It asked them to send instructions in Finnish.⁸

From the start, the three ethnic groups within the party and the league enjoyed a wide autonomy. These strong immigrant communities had their own agendas, and to use Rhonda L. Hinther’s expression, embraced a “cultural-political type of communism,” combining priorities of cultural preservation and expression with a Marxist-Leninist political philosophy.⁹ Indeed these groups developed throughout the interwar period a number of political, social, and cultural activities

to address the realities of immigrant working-class life in Canada. Cultural activities, such as those provided by language schools, sports and dance groups, theatre sections, orchestras, and choirs, were particularly important for immigrant communities.¹⁰ It was this attachment to language and culture that both the Comintern and the Canadian Communist leadership found problematic.

Indeed, the Comintern was aware of the “language sections issue” throughout North America and saw it as a barrier to class solidarity. It insisted in March and June 1925 on gradual and systematic reorganization of language federations within the American and Canadian parties. Such reorganization, the Comintern argued, would facilitate Bolshevization – a policy canonizing the principles of party unity, discipline, and democratic centralism adopted by the Comintern in 1924.¹¹ Bolshevization was also on the YCI’s agenda. The Youth International repeatedly criticized the Canadian league for fostering language sections.¹² In principle, at least, the CPC and the YCL leadership endorsed this internationalist approach. However, it was one thing to accept a “Comintern Line” theoretically, and quite another to put it into effect at home.

The league’s national leadership, mainly anglophone although rarely Canadian-born, saw the lack of Canadian-born youth as a major problem. They urged the rank and file to “make a special effort in order to attract Anglo-Saxon youth.”¹³ Stewart Smith, then the league’s national secretary, was the staunchest advocate of “Canadianization,” which meant the rejection of the language principle.¹⁴ Fred Rose, Montreal YCL organizer, was then the only one who (timidly) tried to criticize this policy at the league’s national convention in September 1925, but ended up voting for it.¹⁵

The isolation of the language sections from each other as well as from the national leadership was not the only problem. Another, according to Smith, was that members of the language sections seemed more interested in cultural activities than political questions. In February 1925 a report by Smith to the YCI stated that many members saw the league merely as a “place of association and entertainment.” In July of the same year, Smith reported that the Ukrainian sections in Ontario and Saskatchewan were completely undeveloped ideologically.¹⁶ In fact, by 1926 the leadership had to admit that the overall ideological level of the rank and file was quite low, even among its most active members. More political education was urgently necessary.¹⁷

In practice, however, it was impossible to reorganize the language sections. They had the most significant memberships within the league, and any attempts to “abolish” them would provoke a huge membership exodus. The CPC, for example, lost a large part of its membership in 1925 when the Finnish organization, displeased by the party’s drive to reorganize language fractions, formally broke its institutional ties with the communists.¹⁸ The sensitivity of the language issue explains in part why the league’s national leadership throughout the 1920s sought to increase its authority within the language sections. Since September 1924, the league tried to control the foreign language press by appointing editorial boards. Publishing literature in foreign languages also required the National Executive Committee’s (NEC) approval.¹⁹ In 1924 the league encouraged the creation of Agitation and Propaganda (Agit-Prop) Committees within the language sections, and after 1925 these committees, elected by members of each section, were to guide the language branches. More importantly, as far as matters of policy were concerned, they became accountable to the National Executive, and later also to the city committees.²⁰ The CPC adopted the same practice. The league’s 1927 constitution granted the NEC the authority to nominate members of language sections’ national Agit-Prop Committees.²¹ The league’s national leadership did not encourage the foundation of new language branches and insisted that those members who could understand and speak English should stay in the regular (non-language-group-based) sections. In practice, however, not all of these provisions were observed by such sections. Moreover, clashes between the national leadership and the language groups were common.

THE LANGUAGE SECTIONS QUESTION AND THE LEAGUE’S “ANTI-UKRAINIAN LEADERSHIP”

The language sections had their own newspapers, which, according to a discussion within the NEC in June 1926, not only impeded the diffusion of the YCL’s national organ *The Young Worker*, but also decentralized the movement.²² In September 1926, the RCMP reported a conflict between the league and the Ukrainian Youth Section, part of the Ukrainian Labour Farmer Temple Association (ULFTA) in Edmonton. The Ukrainians resisted the affiliation of the Youth Section with the YCL.²³ In January 1927 the YCI commented once again on the whole language sections issue. The existence of language units led

to “divisions among the young workers and isolation from general struggle in the unions, shops and mines.”²⁴ The Comintern at the same moment suggested that the CPC start English language classes for “language federations.”²⁵

In late 1928, the issue of the language sections also became the source of disagreements between the league and the party. The most telling was the conflict in December 1928 between the Ukrainian section in Winnipeg and one of the national leaders, John Weir. In fact, throughout 1927–28 the Ukrainian section in particular was a target of harsh criticism from the national executive. In December 1928, Weir (a Ukrainian-Canadian initially named Vyviursky) tried to impose stricter discipline on the Ukrainian youth section in order to turn it into a more militant communist organization and not “just a Ukrainian cultural centre.” Ukrainians, in turn, accused Weir of being ineffective, of not participating in the work of the Ukrainian mass organizations, of being unreliable, and finally, of being “anti-Ukrainian.” This conflict led to Weir being sacked from his post as editor of the Ukrainian youth paper *Youth’s World*. The Ukrainian editorial board did not even consult the league’s National Executive before taking this decision, which was in fact a serious breach of discipline and of the principle of democratic centralism. The CPC, however, took the Ukrainians’ side. The party also decided to punish Weir and Sam Carr, national director of the YCL trade union department (who was also involved in the YCL-Ukrainian Youth Section standoff) by not sending them to the International Lenin School (ILS) in Moscow. The league condemned and opposed this dismissal in its rather scathing resolution to the CPC’s Political Committee (Politcom). The league’s National Executive notably protested against the “condescending attitude” of the party toward the league. Moreover, the league threatened to appeal to the Comintern and the YCI if the party did not change its mind concerning Carr and Weir.²⁶ The case was still being discussed in the league-party correspondences in January 1929.²⁷ The matter was finally settled in favour of the league, and both Carr and Weir eventually went to Moscow.²⁸ The CPC then endured a similar conflict. The Ukrainian section of the party attacked Tim Buck, the CPC’s general secretary, and even drafted a resolution to the Comintern demanding the withdrawal of Buck from the party leadership. The issue was discussed at the Sixth Comintern Congress during which the Anglo-American Secretariat intervened and managed to “smooth the crisis.”²⁹

Toward the end of the decade the YCL’s national leadership still saw the language sections, especially those in rural areas, as “ideologically underdeveloped.” Some of them, in the words of Charlie Marriott, the national agitprop director of the league and editor of the *The Young Worker*, totally “lacked understanding of communist political principles.”³⁰ In January 1929 the issue even found its way into a story in the YCI’s “Special Bulletin”, based on the report by the league’s representative at the YCI EC. This report claimed that language sections (and in particular the Ukrainian one) saw the league as a “non-political [cultural] organization.”³¹ In July 1929 the Comintern also singled out the “low ideological level” of the rank-and-file and local leaderships as one of the major hindrances blocking YCL activities.³² This perceived problem persisted even down to the mid-1930s, to such an extent that one Nova Scotia activist exclaimed: “The political illiteracy is expressed in such strong forms that one sometimes wonders what the hell to say to a thing like that! It’s like making a flower garden in Sahara; you got to get the earth first.”³³

Despite the reported political underdevelopment of certain sections or members, the national leadership had to admit that local and language sections could also be a source of interesting grassroots initiatives. Such was, for example, the case of the Toronto Jewish youth section.

TORONTO YCL JEWISH BRANCH: FROM BOTTOM-UP INITIATIVES TO A NEW SERIES OF CONFLICTS

In February 1926, the Jewish Youth Branch in Toronto, affiliated with the YCL, launched a United Front drive in local trade unions. The branch suggested organizing conferences in the needle, textile, and fur industries, all of which employed significant numbers of young workers. Jacob Roth, the conferences’ secretary and organizer, had stated in his report to the NEC that the slogans and demands of the campaign were “based on concrete grievances of an immediate character,” notably bad working conditions, low wages, and long working hours. The results of the initiative were impressive: after only three months more than ten meetings of young workers had been held, and youth committees were present in every trade union. Moreover, on one occasion several hundred young workers attended a mass meeting and listened to speakers from different organizations as well as union representatives. According to Roth’s report, on the one hand “the meetings became a forum to popularize the ideas of

the YCL and to broadcast them.” On the other hand, “even the right-wing trade union officials, who [had] every reason to oppose [the initiative], were compelled by the broad immediate character of the demands, to promise their support to the work.” The NEC recognized the initiative as valuable and quoted it as a fine example of a united front “from below.”³⁴

That said, two years later in the summer of 1928, the same Jacob Roth and the Jewish YCL branch in Toronto became a source of conflict within the league. The branch revolted against the league hierarchy and formed a real opposition (not Trotskyist as yet) to the league’s NEC, and in particular to Sam Carr, who was at that time one of the business managers of the Jewish press organ *Kampf*. The branch considered Carr and the NEC in general to be too interventionist. The Toronto Jewish Youth wanted to retain its independence. According to CPC comrade Halpern, the branch “has always been characterized by remarkable looseness” – put differently, autonomy – even if, Halpern added, it has always been one of the best YCL branches. The branch even thought of leaving the YCL and creating a parallel Youth Communist organization. The NEC reacted by expelling Roth, prompting a vehement reaction on the part of the Jewish Branch’s rank and file. The party had to intervene to smooth over the conflict and urged the league’s leadership to “adopt a moderate tone” with the Jewish branch and to apply “discipline and Democratic Centralism gradually.”³⁵ The league, however, did not follow this advice immediately, and more members of the Jewish branch were expelled. The mediation process had to be resumed and lasted the whole summer, involving the party’s national Jewish Agit-Prop Committee and the party national leadership. Even the YCI intervened by sending an advisor to “straighten out the matter.” As a result the league recognized some of its own errors in dealing with the dissidence, and in the autumn some of the expelled members, including Roth, were readmitted.³⁶ A similar conflict took place at the same time in the Montreal YCL but was sorted out, and expelled Jewish members were readmitted to the league.³⁷

THE INCURABLE LANGUAGE SECTIONS QUESTION

In the spring of 1929 the Comintern once again brought up the issue of language sections. In a closed pre-convention letter to the party,

the Executive Committee of the Communist International (ECCI) insisted on the necessity of fighting against the “persistence of Social Democratic forms of organization (federalism and independent language groups).”³⁸ Resolutions were passed aiming at integrating language sections into the regular structure of the party, which only resulted in more resistance on the part of these groups. The conflict between the CPC executive and the Finnish and Ukrainian organizations then required direct Comintern intervention. Negotiations took place in 1929–30 in Moscow and Toronto between the party and the language sections leaderships, and the standoff concluded with the Finns’ and Ukrainians’ partial victory. Both organizations managed to retain their independence.³⁹

The YCL lived through the same experience. In the summer of 1929 a new series of conflicts between Ukrainian comrades and YCL leadership unsettled the league. This time the Ukrainian critiques were aimed at Oscar Ryan, the national secretary, who was accused of inspiring factionalism in the Ukrainian section of the YCL.⁴⁰ This particularly difficult relationship with the Ukrainians led the NEC to insist on reorganizing the Ukrainian sections and creating mixed groups operating in the English language.⁴¹ Practically, however, such restructuring remained impossible. In October, in his letter to the YCI EC, Sam Carr had to admit the weight and importance of the language groups. He remarked regretfully that the organization had not “covered yet the Canada born and bred youth.”⁴² It was only in 1931 that the NEC could finally boast in a report to the international of a decrease in Jewish and Ukrainian sections, some of whose members had switched to anglophone units.⁴³

The “language sections issue” would remain unchanged throughout the early 1930s. Despite the Comintern’s and the YCI’s repeated directives to reorganize these groups, language sections would continue enjoying relative autonomy, which would inevitably provoke conflicts with the national executives of both the party and the league. They would also remain the major source of conflict between the international “centre” and the Canadian “periphery.” Only in the mid-1930s, when the Popular Front policy was put into effect in Canada, would both the CPC and the YCL be able to attract a few more anglophone and francophone members into its ranks. The francophones, in fact, constituted another major point of concern for Canadian communists.

THE “STUPENDOUS TASK” OF REACHING THE FRENCH CANADIANS

Some historians of the Canadian left have argued that the CPC was unwilling to address francophone concerns by acknowledging nationalist claims.⁴⁴ During the 1920s, at least, this argument needs to be unpacked. Being internationalists, Canadian communists did consider ethnicity to be a hindrance to the development of class consciousness. However, they believed that it was necessary (and possible) to organize French Canadians as a distinct group within Canadian society. In 1922, the CPC reported to the Comintern that reaching the French Canadian population was a “stupendous task as these people [were] the most conservative and backward in Canada.”⁴⁵ The Comintern itself unequivocally pointed out the importance of work among French Canadians: they represented “native masses” within Canada and could not be compared to “language’ units in the ‘immigrant’ sense.”⁴⁶ Despite this statement, throughout the 1920s the “centre” would pay scant attention to the French Canadian question, and both the party and the league would have to act on their own.

The first communist francophone section of about fifteen members was only formed in 1926 in Montreal.⁴⁷ At the Comintern’s Seventh Plenum, at the end of that year, Tim Buck discussed the question with the French Communist Party (PCF) delegates. As a result the CPC received some general propaganda literature in the French language. The PCF literature, however, was not very helpful, as it did not address the particular situation of French Canadians, specifically in Quebec. The activities of the francophone section were also hampered by the fact that the party could not afford a full-time organizer in the province. It preferred instead to support a non-communist left-wing publication, *L’Ouvrier canadien* (although the RCMP was convinced it was entirely communist), which commenced publication in late 1926–early 1927.⁴⁸ But in January 1927 Buck was still complaining that “the Party [had] no foothold among [Quebec] Workers,” and that “85 per cent of Party membership [in Quebec] were foreign speakers.”⁴⁹

The situation was worse within the league. In 1927 the leadership had to admit that not much progress had been made. In 1928 Charlie Marriott argued that it was urgent to establish francophone sections (at least in Quebec), given the difficult economic situation of the French Canadian population. According to the league’s trade union department, Quebec workers were the poorest of the Canadian

proletariat. If the average wage in fifteen Canadian industries employing the bulk of young workers was about \$10 per week, in Quebec the young workers received only \$6–\$7 per week.⁵⁰ The league could not do much, because of the lack of propaganda literature in French, and most importantly, the absence of francophone organizers.⁵¹ Indeed, some literature sent by the YCI never arrived in Canada – possibly confiscated by border officials, as was often the case with propaganda literature coming from abroad.⁵² As for francophone organizers, the league had difficulty in finding one in Canada and even appealed to the YCI in 1928 to send one (possibly someone from the French league). It warned that it could not finance his or her stay and asked the international for financial support. Yet the international was not ready to subsidize the YCL of Canada, nor would it be for the rest of the 1920s.⁵³ In November 1928 the league stated that the party could not provide much assistance either, as “it [had] also neglected ... the work amongst the French [Canadian] workers.”⁵⁴

And yet in July 1928 French Canadian delegates participated for the first time in the YCL National Convention held in Toronto. This was promising but not enough, in the view of the national leadership. In March 1929 Fred Rose, who had always been an ardent advocate of communist engagement with French Canadians, pointed out the lack of attention toward the French Canadian question in his article in the *Worker*.⁵⁵ The Comintern then also urged – and it did not do this often – the organization of French Canadian workers into an active section of the party.⁵⁶

Consequently, in the summer of 1929, the YCL NEC’s Political Bureau worked out an ambitious plan of recruiting 500 new members, of whom 75 per cent were to be French Canadians and Anglo-Saxons.⁵⁷ The results were discouraging. Indeed, by 1931 the league could boast of setting up only a single French-speaking YCL unit in Montreal, and even this came only after significant efforts from Fred Rose and Dave Kashtan. The Great Depression may have played its role in a greater mobilization of young French Canadians. The economic crisis was indeed particularly severe in Quebec, where the living conditions of workers, wages, and union density had always been lower than in other provinces.⁵⁸ At the same time, the league acknowledged that francophone organizers were still unavailable and Kashtan admitted that his French was not advanced enough for agitation work. Propaganda materials that had been solicited from the French YCL never arrived, and *Ouvrier canadien* was not published regularly.⁵⁹

A report to the YCI maintained that the league even failed to keep and hold the rare membership gains made among French Canadians.⁶⁰ In 1932, the league continued bombarding the YCI and the French YCL with letters asking for help with French language propaganda materials for youth and children, but, *hélas*, to no avail.⁶¹

Nonetheless, in July 1932, some progress in French Canadian work was observed by the Quebec district organizers. In Montreal, for example, the YCL claimed 135 members and aspired to attract sixty more in the next month. It was reported that the French Canadians actively participated in unemployed activities in Montreal's Saint Henri neighbourhood, in particular in rallies against evictions and in organizing unemployed young workers' committees. The league also established five or six French Canadian sports clubs and a football group and expected its young members to become Young Pioneers.⁶²

That said, it is important to point out here that the YCL's national leadership was not above a certain ambiguity as far as the French language issue was concerned. Despite its non-negligible efforts in organizing French Canadians, the NEC repeatedly treated the English language as the main language of Canada. It also defined the drawing of "Anglo-Saxon youth" into the ranks as the most important task, thus ignoring French Canada. The fact that the national leadership was mainly English-speaking must have played its role in what seems to be an inadvertent yet telling discursive disregard of French Canadians. As for the Comintern, it would continue in the early 1930s to demonstrate implicit lack of interest towards French Canada and limit itself to "big talk" when it came to supporting French Canadian issues.

THE "YOUTH," THE "ADULTS," AND THE CANADIAN NATIONHOOD QUESTION

The Canadian sovereignty question was not the focus of attention for either the CPC or the YCL in the early 1920s. Only in 1925 did the leadership start looking into it in earnest. Tim Buck and Maurice Spector, party chief theoretician and editor of *The Worker*, began authoring articles in which they called for "complete independence from British political control" and the abolition of the British North America Act. They promised support to the Liberal bourgeoisie (represented by Mackenzie King's Liberal Party) fighting for Canadian independence.⁶³ The CPC's leadership advocated Canadian

independence as an important demand in its summer 1926 electoral campaign, and, after the election, claimed that King's victory was also a victory over British imperialism. The analysis was in fact in line with the Comintern's foundational document – the Twenty-One Conditions of Admission formulated in the summer of 1920. The latter instructed national parties of the international to expose colonialist policies and support the national liberation movement.⁶⁴ This principle of national liberation was believed to be applicable to Canada. Interestingly, there is no evidence that the Comintern was involved directly in the elaboration of this analysis. Norman Penner argues that the CPC Central Executive worked out this position autonomously.⁶⁵ The Comintern appeared to tacitly agree with the analysis. At least it did not, initially, find fault with it.

It appears that the first opposition to Buck's and Spector's stand on national liberation came not from the “centre” in Moscow, but from the YCL's national leader Stewart Smith in the summer–autumn of 1927. According to Smith's memoirs, his analysis argued against supporting King and Canadian Liberal bourgeoisie. In an article published in *The Worker* in September 1927 as well as in a document he submitted to the Comintern's Anglo-American Secretariat, Smith insisted that Canada's financial oligarchy was caught up in the contradictions of two imperialist powers – Great Britain and the USA. He also pointed out the existence of two nations in Canada – an issue that Buck and Spector failed to address – and advocated national self-determination for the French Canadian people, defined as a nation within the Canadian nation. He concluded by stating that the CPC was to lead Canada (including French Canadians) to independence with such attributes of nationhood as a Canadian bill of rights, a Canadian constitution, and the abolition of all elements of colonialism. However, in the summer of 1928, Spector appeared to disdain this opinion and refused, according to Smith's account, to have a serious discussion about it.⁶⁶ Smith's version of the conflict represented in his memoirs (published in 1993), should, like any memoirs, certainly be taken with a grain of salt. It seems, however, that Smith's account can be relied on. When in 1929 the Comintern came to criticize Smith's analysis of Canadian independence, it would do so based on the points formulated by Smith in 1927.

It is hard to say at the same time that Smith's position was also that of the YCL. In 1926 Smith travelled to Moscow and became the first Canadian student of the ILS. He would spend three years almost

entirely in Moscow. Although during those years he was in touch with fellow YCLers in Canada, the league's documents do not reveal discussions of nationhood and independence questions. However, it can be presumed that Smith's position was not necessarily shared by his colleagues in the NEC in 1927, as two years later it would be criticized by the new YCL leadership.

Indeed, Smith's analysis, but also the Comintern's left turn and the change of climate within its central apparatus in 1928, made the Comintern give more attention to the issue of Canadian nationhood. In the course of 1929, the "centre" would modify its position on the Canadian independence question more than once.

During the Sixth Comintern Congress no less a personage than Nikolai Bukharin, then still Comintern chairman, pointed out that the question of independence was complicated by the fact that Canada had come to be entirely within the economic sphere of the USA. The CPC's leader Jack MacDonald then disagreed with this position, and, without denying American influence, underlined the importance of British domination in Canada. In April 1929 the Comintern's Political Secretariat further criticized both Buck's and Smith's positions (Spector no longer being in the picture, as he had already come out as Trotskyist and had been expelled from the CPC). The Canadian bourgeoisie, the Comintern pointed out, was a fully developed ruling class that made use of the Anglo-Canadian conflict to its own advantage and retained the forms of colonialism for the same purposes.⁶⁷

At the same time the new cohort of Canadian ILS students, all of them YCLers – Sam Carr, Leslie Morris, and John Weir – published a series of critical articles in *The Communist International* magazine in June and October. Both Smith and Buck came under heavy criticism and were accused of holding Spector's views – and thus Trotskyist views – on the issue. Leslie Morris (alias John Porter) in particular suggested that Canadian communists should revise their approach in view of the new autonomy accorded Canada by the Balfour Declaration of 1926.⁶⁸

The CPC and the YCL consequently dropped the independence slogan and replaced it with a new and peculiar analysis. The analysis predicted an inevitable Anglo-American war in which Canada would become one of the battlefields. This war promised to provoke a division of interests between Canadian capitalists, and thus lead to a civil war. The Canadian working class, according to this theory, should exploit its opportunity to "smash the war-breeding imperialism in Canada by revolutionary action against the Canadian bourgeoisie and the establishment of a revolutionary Workers and Farmers

government.”⁶⁹ In fact it was the Comintern that worked out this analysis. Smith believed that Stalin himself had devised it.⁷⁰

Whoever the author was, the “centre” very soon amended its analysis once again. In an October 1929 letter to the CPC it insisted on the importance of inner contradictions within Canadian society.⁷¹ Both the party and the YCL would eventually abandon the Anglo-American war theme. Following the Comintern’s criticism, by the end of 1930 both agreed upon defining Canada itself as an “imperialist power.”

CONCLUSIONS

The Canadian communist movement was far from being homogeneous. It included several relatively autonomous groups based on ethnic and linguistic identification, which complicated class identity. Canadian communists were also divided into youth and adults, two groups that often had competing visions on issues. This complex structure could not but affect the relationship with the “centre” in Moscow. In the long run it gave Canadian communists a certain room to manoeuvre, even if the national leadership found it difficult to achieve all of its goals.

In the 1920s the CPC and the YCL worked out policies on Canadian nationhood which the Comintern found relevant. Both the CPC and the YCL put special emphasis on the task of winning French Canadians over to the communist cause and did not appear to need the Comintern’s directives to carry out this policy. At the same time, while reflecting on ethnicity, Canadian communists tended to comply with the “Comintern Line.” However, they found it difficult – sometimes impossible – to put these policies into effect on the ground. Smith’s drive to “Canadianize” groups based on the ethnic principle failed. Thus by the end of the 1920s language sections remained a major source of conflict between the international’s “centre” and the Canadian “periphery.”

NOTES

- 1 Ian Angus, *Canadian Bolsheviks: The Early Years of the Communist Party of Canada* (Montreal: Vanguard Publications, 1981), 3.
- 2 The terms “centre” and “periphery” were introduced by Mikhail Narinsky and Jürgen Rojahn. See Mikhail Narinsky and Jürgen Rojahn, eds., *Centre and Periphery: The History of the Comintern in the Light of New*

Documents (Amsterdam: International Institute of Social History, 1996). For some recent studies on national communist parties (to mention only a few) that engage with and often complicate this perspective, see: Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Verso, 1998); Rodolfo Cerdas-Cruz, *The Communist International in Central America 1920–1936* (London: Macmillan, 1993); Stuart Macintyre, *The Reds: The Communist Party of Australia from Origins to Illegality* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1998); Anthony Thorpe, *The British Communist Party and Moscow, 1920–1943* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000); Emmet O'Connor, *Reds and the Green: Ireland, Russia and the Communist International, 1919–43* (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2004); Sobhanlal Datta Gupta, *Comintern and the Destiny of Communism in India, 1919–1943: Dialectics of a Real and Possible History* (Calcutta: Seribaan, 2006); Matthew Worley, *Class against Class: The Communist Party in Britain between the Wars* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2002); Randi Storch, *Red Chicago: American Communism at Its Grassroots, 1928–1935* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009); Nina Fishman, *The British Communist Party and the Trade Unions, 1933–1945* (Brookfield: Scholar, 1995); Jacob A. Zumoff, *The Communist International and US Communism, 1919–1929* (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2014).

- 3 By autumn 1922, the CPC (renamed Workers Party of Canada [WPC] between 1922 and 1924) had 4,810 members. Interestingly enough, the WPC/CPC membership was proportionately greater than that of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB). In 1923 the Young Communist League reported having 650 members in thirty branches all over Canada. In September 1925 the YCL counted 1,005 members and forty-eight branches, and about a thousand Young Pioneers. Based on different figures that contradict each other, another increase could be observed by 1928: 1,200 league members and 600 Young Pioneers (1,200 Pioneers according to another source). These numbers appear to be relatively unimportant. However, in the summer of 1925 the Canadian YCL had three to four times the membership of the American League, and had more branches and three times the membership of the British organization. William Rodney, *Soldiers of the International: A History of the Communist Party of Canada, 1919–1929* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1968), 66, 88; "Letter to the YCI EC," Toronto, 20 August 1923, Moscow, Russia, Rossiiskiy gosudarstvennyi arkhiv sotsial'no-politicheskoi istorii (RGASPI), f. 533, op. 10, d. 1608, ll. 20, 29; RGASPI, 533.10.1616, 21; RGASPI, 533.10.1643, 2; Public Archives of Ontario, CP 11C-2672, CP 4A-2730, cited in Angus, *Canadian Bolsheviks*, 199.

- 4 RGASPI, 533.10.1625, 2–4.
- 5 RGASPI, 533.10.1614, 7–9.
- 6 RGASPI, 495.2.13, 120–7.
- 7 RGASPI, 533.10.1647, 9.
- 8 RGASPI, 533.10.1611, 8.
- 9 Rhonda L. Hinther, “Raised in the Spirit of the Class Struggle: Children, Youth, and the Interwar Ukrainian Left in Canada,” *Labour/Le Travail* 60 (Fall 2007): 43–76.
- 10 See Donald Avery, “Ethnic Loyalty and the Proletarian Revolution: A Case Study of Communist Political Activity in Winnipeg, 1923–1936,” in *Ethnicity, Power and Politics in Canada*, edited by Jorgen Dahlie and Tissa Fernando (Toronto: Methuen, 1981), 68–91; Edward W. Laine, “Finnish Canadian Radicalism and Canadian Politics: the First Forty Years: 1900–1940,” in *Ethnicity, Power and Politics in Canada*, edited by Jorgen Dahlie and Tissa Fernando, 94–112; Carmela Patrias, “Relief Strike: Immigrant Workers and the Great Depression in Crowland, Ontario, 1930–35,” in *A Nation of Immigrants: Women, Workers, and Communities in Canadian History*, edited by Franca Iacovetta (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 322–58; Ester Reiter, “Secular ‘Yiddishkait’: Left Politics, Culture, and Community,” *Labour / Le Travail* 49 (Spring 2002): 121–46; “Camp Navelt and the Daughters of the Jewish Left,” in *Sisters or Strangers?: Immigrant, Ethnic and Racialized Women in Canadian History*, edited by Franca Iacovetta, Frances Swyripa, and Marlene Epp (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 365–80; and Reiter, *A Future without Hate or Need: The Promise of the Jewish Left in Canada* (Toronto: Between the Lines Press, 2016).
- 11 Kevin McDermott and Jeremy Agnew, *The Comintern: A History of International Communism from Lenin to Stalin* (New York: St Martin’s Press, 1997), 42; Rodney, *Soldiers*, 84; Avery, “Ethnic Loyalty,” 69.
- 12 RGASPI, 553.10.1626, 2; RGASPI, 533.10.1627, 1–8.
- 13 RGASPI, 533.10.1609, 1.
- 14 Stewart Smith, *Comrades and Komsomolkas: My Years in the Communist Party of Canada* (Toronto: Lugsus, 1993), 78.
- 15 RGASPI, 533.10.1614, 4.
- 16 RGASPI, 533.10.1616, 24–5.
- 17 RGASPI, 533.10.1620, 115–16.
- 18 John Manley, “Communism and the Canadian Working Class during the Great Depression: The Workers Unity League, 1930–1936,” (PhD diss., Dalhousie University, 1984), 32.
- 19 RGASPI, 533.10.1611, 22.
- 20 RGASPI, 533.10.1615, 3–5.

- 21 RGASPI, 533.10.1625, 4–5.
- 22 RGASPI, 533.10.1621, 8–9, 20.
- 23 Gregory S. Kealey and Reg Whitaker, eds., *The R.C.M.P. Security Bulletins: The Early Years, 1919–1929* (St John's: Canadian Committee on Labour History, 1994), 351.
- 24 RGASPI, 533.10.1627, 1–8, 10.
- 25 Rodney, *Soldiers*, 85.
- 26 RGASPI, 533.10.1635, 24–5.
- 27 RGASPI, 533.10.1646, 1.
- 28 RGASPI, f. 495.22.26, 15.
- 29 Angus, *Canadian Bolsheviks*, 203.
- 30 RGASPI, 533.10.1636, 17–19.
- 31 RGASPI, 1.21.199, 61.
- 32 "Kuusinen's commentary of the report on the international situation at the Tenth Plenum of ECCI," 13 July 1929, in M. M. Mukhamedzhanov, G.E. Pavlova, E.N Sokolov, *Komintern, Kim i molodezhnoe dvizhenie, 1919–1943: Sbornik dokumentov* (Moskva: Politizdat, 1977), 393–4.
- 33 LAC, Communist International fonds, MG 10-K3, R14860-0-3-E, reel K-301, 533.10.1693, 65.
- 34 RGASPI, 533.10.1620, 75–6.
- 35 RGASPI, 533.10.1637, 12–13.
- 36 Roth, however, preferred to distance himself from the Jewish Branch and soon was drawn to the nascent Trotskyist movement. So were some other disillusioned Jewish Young Communists who later approached Spector and formed the core of the Left Opposition in Canada. RGASPI, 533.10.1637, 20–1; RGASPI, 533.10.1635, 28–9; RGASPI, 495.222.26, 29.
- 37 RGASPI, 1.21.199, 63.
- 38 Rodney, *Soldiers*, 152; RGASPI, 1.21.199, 61.
- 39 Angus, *Canadian Bolsheviks*, 296–311.
- 40 Ibid., 251.
- 41 RGASPI, 1.21.199, 61–3.
- 42 RGASPI, 533.10.1646, 5.
- 43 LAC, R14860-0-3-E, K-297, 533.10.1664, 52.
- 44 Donald Avery, "Dangerous Foreigners": *European Immigrant Workers and Labour Radicals in Canada, 1896–1932* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1979), 116–17; Caren Irr, *The Suburb of Dissent: Cultural Politics in the U.S. and Canada during the 1930s* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1998), 149.
- 45 RGASPI, 495.2.13, 120–7.
- 46 "Draft letter of the Organizational Department of the ECCI to the Canadian Party," cited in Andrée Lévesque, *Scènes de la vie en rouge:*

- L'époque de Jeanne Corbin 1906–1944* (Montréal: Éditions du Remue-ménage, 1999), 85.
- 47 Kealey and Whitaker, eds., *The R.C.M.P. Security Bulletins, 1919–29*, 306; Claude Larivière, *Albert Saint-Martin, militant d'avant-garde* (Montréal: Éditions coopératives Albert Saint-Martin, 1979), 140; Ivan Avakumovic, *The Communist Party in Canada* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1975), 255.
- 48 Rodney, *Soldiers*, 132; Kealey and Whitaker, *The R.C.M.P. Security Bulletins, 1919–29*, 306.
- 49 Report of Tim Buck to the Comintern, 12 January 1927, cited in Mikhail Bjorge, “‘They Shall Not Die’: Anarchists, Syndicalists, Communists, and the Sacco and Vanzetti Solidarity Campaign in Canada,” *Labour/Le travail* 75 (Spring 2015): 53.
- 50 RGASPI, 533.10.1645, 2.
- 51 RGASPI, 533.10.1624, 3–4.
- 52 RGASPI, 553.10.1626, 1; RGASPI, 533.10.1627, 14–21; Kealey and Whitaker, *The R.C.M.P. Security Bulletins, 1919–29*, 652–68.
- 53 RGASPI, 533.10.1636, 9–10. For the financial relationship between the YCL and the YCI, see Daria Dyakonova, “‘Tomber amoureux de la République soviétique et diffuser cet amour dans le monde entier’: Les jeunes communistes canadiens et l’URSS dans les années 1920,” *Le Manuscrit, Éditions colloques*, 2016, <http://www.revuelemanuscrit.uqam.ca/index.php/edition-colloque/colloque-sovietique/74-tomber-amoureux-de-la-republique-sovietique-et-diffuser-cet-amour-dans-le-monde-entier-les-jeunes-communistes-canadiens-et-l-urss-dans-les-annees-1920>.
- 54 RGASPI, 533.10.1645, 11.
- 55 *The Worker*, 9 March 1929.
- 56 Aloysius Balawdyer, *Canadian-Soviet Relations between the World Wars* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972), 178.
- 57 RGASPI, 533.10.1647, 11–12.
- 58 Andrée Lévesque, *Virage à gauche interdit: Les communistes, les socialistes et leurs ennemis au Québec, 1929–1939* (Montréal: Boréal Express, 1984), 29.
- 59 LAC, R14860-0-3-E, K-298, 533.10.1666, 118.
- 60 RGASPI, 533.10.1664, 15–16.
- 61 LAC, R14860-0-3-E, K-299, 533.10.1674, 24.
- 62 RGASPI, 533.10.1678, 12–13.
- 63 Norman Penner, *Canadian Communism: The Stalin Years and Beyond* (Toronto: Methuen, 1988), 87.
- 64 *Thèses, manifestes et résolutions adoptés par les Ier, IIe, IIIe et IVe Congrès de l'Internationale communiste (1919–1923): Textes*

complets, Internationale communiste (Montréal: Librairie progressiste, 1934), 40.

65 Penner, *Canadian Communism*, 85.

66 Smith, *Comrades and Komsomolkas*, 105–6, 109.

67 Penner, *Canadian Communism*, 87.

68 Ibid., 87–8; John Porter (Leslie Morris), “The Struggle against the Right Danger in CPC: The Dominion Problem,” *The Communist International* 2, no. 23 (1929): 944.

69 RGASPI, 533.10.1638, 18.

70 Smith, *Comrades and Komsomolkas*, 129.

71 Angus, *Canadian Bolsheviks*, 259.

“It Is Better to Retreat Now Than Be Crushed Altogether”

Questions of Ethnicity and the Communist Party of Canada at the Lakehead

Michel S. Beaulieu

On 25 June 1935, Robert Manion, Fort William Member of Parliament and future leader of the Conservative Party of Canada, speaking at the occasion of the completion of the Trans-Canada highway, used the opportunity to comment on the radicalism present in Canada. “All true Canadians,” he told onlookers and the media, “should be prepared to take their part in maintaining law and order ... Let us guard our country and its institutions against any revolutionary groups’ doctrines.”¹ Such a sentiment, made with the international communist movement in mind, was fitting. The Lakehead had been one of the birthplaces of leftism in Canada and one of its centres for three decades, and it was considered one of the most likely locations for a “Bolshevik revolution” to begin.² Yet, somewhat ironically, Manion’s concerns were voiced at a time when communist leaders, nationally and at the Canadian Lakehead, found themselves embattled to the point that they recommended to the rank and file “to retreat now” rather than “be crushed altogether.”³

Many within the Communist Party of Canada (CPC) at the time (and even those who had re-envisioned its history in the 1970s) viewed this strategy as part of a larger plan, consciously designed to reimagine Canada in keeping with the principles of the Third International. Yet international frameworks, in this case those emanating from Russia following the Russian Revolution and the establishment of the Third

International, must be examined in the context of what Ian McKay has called “the Liberal Order Framework.”⁴ Canada, McKay has argued, denotes “a historically specific project of rule, rather than either an essence we must defend or an empty homogenous space we must possess.”⁵ Its development in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was rooted in notions of Canada as a “liberal order,” and its history should be viewed “simultaneously as an extensive projection of liberal rule across a large territory and an intensive process of subjectification, whereby liberal assumptions are internalized and normalized within the dominion’s subjects.”⁶

The story of the relationship between non-Anglo workers and the CPC at the Canadian Lakehead demonstrates this phenomenon. As John Manley has written, by the time of the Popular Front, “the party’s main objective was the construction of cross-class alliances to defend bourgeois democracy.”⁷ In doing so, though, it would force many of its strongest supporters, in particular the Finns of Northwestern Ontario, not only to question the CPC’s and the Comintern’s motives, but also to turn to other leftist political manifestations.⁸ By 1934, the Communist Party of Canada completed the positioning of non-Anglo left politics in Canada firmly within, not apart from, the liberal order that Robert Manion so dearly sought to protect.

The Canadian Lakehead is an ideal region to use as a lens to explore communism in Canada and its relationship with the international. The organization of workers at the Lakehead dates back centuries, with the first known “strike” having occurred when eighteenth century voyageurs withheld their work while traversing the route between Montreal and Fort William. Between 1900 and 1939, many, if not all, of northern North America’s manifestations of organized labour and leftist politics existed here in some form.⁹ The arrival of former American Federation of Labor organizer Harry Bryan in 1902 led to the firm establishment of trade unions in the region, with over twenty-two existing by 1904.¹⁰ Bryan’s organizing acumen came to be intimately associated with the various manifestations of the socialist project at the Lakehead and provides a unique vantage into its complexities. What Bryan called “race-prejudice” was one of the many symptoms of the capitalist system and existing liberal order.¹¹

Division and prejudice – whether based on ethnicity, nationality, or even type of work – were hallmarks of early expressions of socialism at the Lakehead and across Canada. The ineffectiveness of the various sections of the Socialist Party of Canada (SPC) stemmed, in

part, from its lack of inclusiveness. Divisions erupted over the party's position on industrial workers, criticisms by non-Anglo members of systemic ethnic prejudice, and the rejection by doctrinaire theoreticians of proposals to join the Second International and adopt reforms and tactics currently in use in Europe.¹² Similarly, the Social Democratic Party of Canada (SDPC), formed by those socialists who split with the SPC over its policies in 1911, faced opposition from many trade unions and, politically, the various incarnations of the Independent Labour Parties (ILP).¹³ As Jean Morrison argues, while "the Social Democratic party posed no real or imagined menace to the citizens of Port Arthur ... what alarmed the English-speaking community was the newly won influence of the socialists with the immigrant workers."¹⁴

Following the Russian Revolution and Winnipeg General Strike, the rise of the One Big Union (OBU) and then the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) altered the political and labour landscape in Canada and at the Lakehead. Although Bryan, as OBU organizer William Holder remarked, was "a guiding light" during this period, a significant transition began to occur within the left that mimicked national and international trends.¹⁵ The collapse of the SPC and SDPC and the restrictions on many organizations under the repressive War Measures Act led many to the umbrella of the OBU. At the Lakehead, most of labour's leadings voices lent their talents to organizing on its quasi-syndicalist behalf. They demonstrated an enduring Lakehead trait of resisting any policies that assumed their passive acquiescence in strategies and tactics imposed from without.

For many, syndicalism, direct action, and non-political involvement were also highly problematic. Harry Bryan's speeches in the years after 1920, for example, built on his experiences and reflections on the syndicalist movements in Italy and Africa. He and others in the region viewed the pro-IWW Socialist Labour Party founded in Johannesburg, for instance, as demonstrative of the inherent sectarianism that syndicalism fostered. Syndicalism, he increasingly urged his fellow workers, would lead the working class to defeat: "If a man walks down a street with one hand behind his back, meets a policeman that wants to club him or arrest him he would have no chance. It is the same way the working class would have no chance by having not being involved directly in politics [sic]."¹⁶ It should come as no surprise, then, that many established workers were not supporters of the IWW and its policy of not participating in politics. However, what

made that organization stand out and allowed it to continue to be a significant force for the next two decades was its inclusiveness in terms of language, race, gender, and ethnicity. At the Lakehead, as in much of Canada, the fall of the One Big Union was much more complex than traditional accounts, emphasizing organizational philosophies, tend to imply.¹⁷

Those who left the OBU and joined a reorganized IWW eschewed nationalist arguments and favoured instead an internationalism that, despite the organization's American roots, also tapped into current European socialism. It was a formule that found a ready audience in the thousands of immigrants migrating to North America in the 1920s. While Ian Angus is correct in his conclusion that the establishment of the Third International in Moscow provided the impetus for Canadian socialism to undergo another profound and dramatic change, it can also be described as a moment of "discovery" by many non-immigrants of an international framework, one that both mobilized and divided them.¹⁸

But was it really different? The initial period of communism as expressed through the Workers' Party of Canada (WPC) presented an alternative for those tired of sectarianism within the Canadian left and to recent immigrants, particularly Finns and Ukrainians, who already discerned in Soviet Russia a plausible path to victory.¹⁹ Although the WPC was quick to reach out to existing organizations, it also immediately began working against forces that were avowedly anti-state and somewhat more revolutionary, such as the IWW.

The reason for this is simple: communism, at least the variant that evolved out of the Third World Congress in 1921, while advocating the United Front as one of its core principles, also encouraged "boring from within" to achieve its goal of transnational leftist hegemony.²⁰ It entailed, in other words, an even more heightened program of sectarianism than that used against the existing liberal political structure. Heavily influencing many socialists of all red hues during this period was Vladimir Lenin's argument that "Communists in western countries must participate actively in parliaments and trade unions, and not shrink from the compromises inherent in such participation."²¹ As John Manley writes, the Canadian party "operated almost exclusively as a left wing faction inside Canada's dominant trade union federation, the Trades and Labour Congress (TLC)."²²

It was a delicate situation that, in no small part, rested on the lasting impact and ideological reconsideration of regional labour leaders.

Harry Bryan's conversion to the communist cause, for example, was a major coup for the WPC, but also one that had as much to do with the past failure of leftist expressions at the Lakehead as it did with any directives coming from Russia. Bryan's speeches during the early 1920s demonstrate the communist approach. Without fail they attacked other organizations, the IWW chief amongst them, for their failure to participate in the Canadian political system, arguing that political participation was necessary for lasting change. Wobblies, understandably, shook their heads in disbelief at what they saw as a convoluted logic based on a narrow vision.

As in many parts of Canada, Lakehead communists attempted to apply the boring from within policy, but in this context – one in which the IWW was an enduringly powerful presence – the result was paradoxical and led to communists attempting to work with syndicalists. Here were two forces that, ideologically, never should have been and ultimately could not be in bed with each other, at least from an orthodox communist perspective. While it is difficult to ascertain the actual interest of the Anglo-American Secretariat of the Comintern in Canadian activities, records suggest that it was a passing one. Comintern officials were more concerned with issues having to do with the party in the United States, Britain, and even Egypt.²³ The Lakehead communists' implicit link with the IWW went unremarked upon.

Not surprisingly, the party's highly centralized structure and an unpreparedness to deal with the realities of ethnic and regional politics immediately resulted in factionalism. Communists were the inheritors of the divisions that had undermined the SPC and OBU.²⁴ For example, the involvement of the Ukrainian Labour Farmer Temple Association and the Finnish Organization of Canada provided the Communist Party of Canada with a base of support, although one largely centered in non-urban regions of the country dominated by natural resource extractive industries. However, this support from the beginning coexisted with a vision of a world communist movement characterized by "a revolutionary platform and programme and an open declaration for the Third (Communist) International and a guarantee in the party constitution of democratic centralism in the party while allowing the sections the possibility of conducting their work without unnecessary hindrance or constraint."²⁵ Take the example of Helmer Borg. Having been introduced to the IWW while working as a harvester in Saskatchewan, he admired them for their

commitment to direct action when necessary. At the same time, Borg thought communists were merely piggy-backing on the work of the IWW and other non-communist trade unions.²⁶ A positive aspect of the communist policies and IWW confusion, at least for the RCMP, was that by the mid-1920s such divisions worked to paralyze them when it came to organizing workers.²⁷

Ultimately, the CPC's decision to abandon the WPC was based on pragmatism and necessity.²⁸ However, it is here that the conundrum the party faced is most apparent. It badly wanted to diversify the party's membership away from the Finnish and Ukrainian communities. But most anglophones and francophones seemed uninterested in it. Similarly, workers, at least at the Lakehead, still generally balked at centralized authority (particularly when not included within it), and, after the First World War, they were disturbed by the communists' seeming willingness to take orders from Moscow. While the idea of world communism may have appealed to a large number of leftists, decisions at the local levels confounded just as many.

For example, when questioning changes to the CPC and organizing issues at the Lakehead, one worker in November 1925 confronted district organizers William Checkley and Malcolm Bruce, asking if, in fact, Bruce "takes his orders from Moscow?" Bruce replied, "Yes" to which the "questioner, a profound Marxian of the district, sat down saying, 'that's all I want.'"²⁹ These questions stemmed from the persistent notion that the CPC was a pale reflection of the red revolution underway in Russia.³⁰

Stalin's Moscow-centric approach meant that a previous policy of forming coalitions and appealing to the masses came to be seen as undesirable. Marxism-Leninism came to be interpreted as the only acceptable form of socialist doctrine.³¹ While it was hoped that this would reinvigorate the revolutionary energies of the national parties through their reorganization along factory and industrial lines rather than geographic and ethnic ones, the policy of "Bolshevization" negatively affected the CPC's immigrant members who tended to belong to the party through language fractions. "Bolshevization," argues John Manley, "became the 'watchword' of the leading Russian group 'and a central directive to every individual party.' Parties threatened by heresies and deviations were instructed to [B]olshevize (purify) themselves."³²

The leadership between 1924 and 1928 paid only lip service to the Comintern's directives.³³ As about 80 per cent of the party consisted

of non-English speaking members, the possibility of alienating the majority of the party's membership was a prime concern.³⁴ The Comintern, in turn, cared little about the Canadian situation, and with the formal adoption of the policy, the CPC was directed to prepare for the change.³⁵ The party was also told to direct its energy to specifically focus on English-speaking workers in the industrial regions of the country.

At the Fifth Convention of the CPC in 1926, the Politburo fell in line with the Comintern's decision to centralize power and counter what some in the party erroneously viewed as the growing influence and even predominance of the various language federations. Its policy of Bolshevization amounted to an attempt to overcome the dominance of the Ukrainian and Finnish language federations.³⁶ It is unclear whether underlying racial and ethnic prejudice or a blind lust for power drove them, but party leaders such as Tim Buck used the issue to seize the reins of the CPC leadership. As Becky Buhay wrote in March of 1929, it was believed that a "centralized party leadership" was impossible without the rooting out of ethnic and linguistic particularisms in the interests of party discipline.³⁷ Such a position did not reflect the nuances of the Canadian left.

As in the United States, the Comintern's policy was ultimately divisive and forced many immigrant workers into alternative expressions of socialism such as the IWW or social democratic parties.³⁸ It is interesting that officials in the Comintern, despite the CPC's reports, remained oblivious to the reality of the situation and never realized that their own policy was contributing to what they viewed as the chaos in the North American communist movement.³⁹ The chief "culprit," in their opinion, was the continuing social democratic tradition amongst many European immigrants to North America who comprised the vast majority of the membership in the language organizations.⁴⁰ As Ian Angus suggests, the ultimate failure of CPC political activity in the 1920s resulted from "its very tenuous, limited roots in the unions and its lack of popular support."⁴¹

While strike after strike demonstrated that working with other organizations offered a "splendid illustration that where the rank and file has the will, a united front of two union organizations can be satisfactorily made," not working with unions led to poor electoral results.⁴² Working with unions, though, was viewed by some as debasing the revolution. Mixed in with this was a commitment to organize more Anglo and – especially in the Third Period – francophone

workers. Nonetheless, by 1928, the party remained approximately 85 per cent non-English speaking.⁴³

"In 1928," according to Ivan Avakumovic, "the Comintern reached several crucial decisions which affected the fortunes of all its sections, including the one in Canada."⁴⁴ At the ninth Executive Committee of the Communist International Plenum held in February that year, a new line was adopted to reflect the prevailing belief that "capitalism was now moving back into crisis." The movement had entered the Third Period.⁴⁵ The central thesis of Third Period political theory was that the communists' rivals on the left were social fascists. Other socialist parties, such as social democrats throughout much of the west, were predestined to act as the "last reserve" of the old order" and it "was the duty of the Communists to unmask the role being played in the labour movement by socialist leaders, including left-wingers, and to win over the socialist rank-and-file." According to the Comintern, the slogan "class against class" now characterized "the struggle throughout the world."⁴⁶

In Canada this pattern manifested itself, Ian Angus suggests, in the "takeover of the Communist Party of Canada by the [Tim] Buck – [Stewart] Smith faction in July 1929." As Angus contends, Buck's ascension "was no simple change of personnel, but a total change in the policies and program of the Canadian Communist movement." In keeping with decisions reached in Moscow, the communist movement in Canada became "more or less ... subordinate to the foreign policy goals of the Stalinist leadership."⁴⁷

"Class against class has usually been seen as a disaster," Tim Rees and Andrew Thorpe have convincingly argued.⁴⁸ In later years, even the CPC leadership, in particular Tim Buck, distanced itself from the policies of the Third Period, suggesting that they "were the result of errors made while the real leaders [of the CPC] were in jail."⁴⁹ Although, as Ian McKay writes, the "CPC was one of the last in the world to take Stalin's side," once it did, the new line exerted a profound influence over its strategy and tactics.⁵⁰

The CPC's efforts to enact the directives of the Comintern (in particular Bolshevization) had unexpected consequences. In part, they were responsible for the loss of almost half of the CPC's membership between 1925 and 1929.⁵¹ The predominance of the lumber workers in the region and the large number of Finns and Ukrainians resulted in the majority of the district leadership being non-Anglo in origin, a situation exacerbated by the overall decline in membership.⁵²

Nationally, 80 per cent of the membership did not speak English and 60 per cent were Finnish.⁵³

Much like in other regions with high proportions of non-Anglo members, throughout this period tensions began to mount at the Lakehead due to the growing disconnect between the policies of the leadership and the concerns of socialists. The most significant consequence of Moscow's insistence upon Bolshevization by 1930 was the rising influence of the IWW at the Lakehead – despite the Wobblies' very minor significance elsewhere in interwar Canada.

When in the summer of 1928 the Sixth Congress of the Communist International declared that national organizations should prepare for the onset of a worldwide revolution, the CPC was also embroiled in its own internal struggles to respond effectively to the call. At the Profintern's Fourth Congress in March–April, calls were made for the Trade Union Education League "to become the nucleus of a new organization for the workers in organized industries, while at the same time remaining the focal point for the left-wing members of the 'reformist unions.'" By the time of the Comintern's Sixth Congress in July and August, a policy of dual unionism and a shift to "a class against class policy" had been adopted.⁵⁴

As one of the last parties in the world to be fully "Stalinized," and because of the continued leadership roles of Trotskyist Maurice Spector and equivocal Jack MacDonald until 1928 and 1929 respectively, the CPC was rebuked for lagging behind the world communist movement. It was argued that the CPC needed to "bring out in a more clear and sharp form the identity of the Party as the revolutionary party of the Canadian working class."⁵⁵ Addressing this issue was of utmost importance, the Anglo-American Secretariat contended, because the economic and political situation in Canada placed the country "definitely in the midst of the 'third period' outlined in the thesis of the VI Congress of the Communist International. The stabilization, rationalization and increased development of Canadian capitalism is fraught with contradictions that will embroil the country in the coming imperialist war."⁵⁶ Central to tackling the problem were the trade unions. The CPC leadership believed that only by "winning the masses of workers" in the All-Canadian Congress of Labour and Trades and Labour Congress of Canada (the two national trade union organizations) could the party be positioned to take advantage of the turmoil that would inevitably grip the country. The past hostility towards immigrant labourers

on the part of both organizations had in fact been the reason for many joining the CPC.

However, the Anglo-American Secretariat criticized the CPC for its past efforts and rebuked the Central Executive Committee (CEC) for its past work. The Canadian party had “too often been directed from the ‘top’ instead of from the rank-and-file, as is evidenced by the slogan ‘Amalgamation of the two Congresses.’” Similarly, in attempting to organize the unorganized, the CPC was cautioned not to overestimate the possibility or desirability of the two labour federations doing this work.⁵⁷ Perhaps the largest obstacle to implementing a successful recruiting campaign was a shortage of Anglo-Saxon organizers. There was also the issue of the continued conflict between the CEC and non-English speaking members. “The membership of the Party,” the Comintern remarked, “still remains of an unsatisfactory quality. Greater efforts must be made by the Party to recruit Anglo-Saxon workers from the best elements of the progressives in the trade unions.”⁵⁸

The CPC’s conception of its “great task” of revolution, one strongly influenced by the Comintern and by graduates of the Lenin School in Moscow, entailed the party’s more thorough Canadianization. It was directed by Moscow to draw more English-speaking “British and American immigrants,” and more English- and French-speaking “native-born Canadians,” into its ranks. How could this be balanced with the party’s continuing reliance upon the Finns and Ukrainians? It was caught in a dilemma. Bolshevization, and later Stalinization, meant relegating the foreign-language groups to the periphery.

Retaining the “red bases” the CPC had so painstakingly built in Northwestern Ontario meant paying close attention to precisely these groups. The “new line” meant focusing intently on factories. However, the “old realities” of the party stubbornly drew the latter’s attention back to its traditional bases in mining, forestry, and other resource industries. The party was being pulled in at least two directions.⁵⁹ Many remained skeptical about the new strategy’s overall success. Responding to Buck’s report to the Sixth Convention, J. Carey, an organizer from Fort William, argued that a disunited and distracted leadership did “not understand the Party’s tasks.”⁶⁰

As organizer Alf Hautamäki’s correspondence reveals, by 1929, the attempts by the CPC leaders to centralize their power had largely failed in the region. In practice, the party was still at the whim of the (theoretically non-existent but actually potent) language federations.

The CPC adopted a much harder stance towards these following harsh criticism by the Comintern in late 1929. The CPC had been strongly reminded that “the chief objectives of the language organizations must be to become real mass organizations which are to draw the foreign born workers into the general stream of the Canadian Labour Movement.”⁶¹

An interesting twist is that many non-Anglo communists in regions such as the Lakehead still continued to believe in the Comintern, going so far as to blame the CPC leadership for attacking the language organizations and questioned “whether the present leadership of the C.P. of C. has the confidence of the Comintern.”⁶² Often during this period it was party faithful who belonged to particular ethnocultural and linguistic groups that kept the rank-and-file from leaving en masse from the Lakehead and similar areas.⁶³

As John Manley and others have argued, the establishment of the Workers’ Unity League (WUL) occurred during a period that “traditionalist” historians have regard as “the Comintern’s darkest hour, the moment when Stalinism triumphed in the International and Moscow’s instructions politically disabled the working-class movement.”⁶⁴ It was during this phase that “the slogan ‘class against class’ now fully characterized the struggle throughout the world.” The CPC’s adoption of the tactics of the Third Period, while achieving limited political success, overall had negative consequences. The Comintern was also inconsistent. For example, when the CPC expelled prominent Finnish organizers in 1929 following orders from the political secretary of the Comintern, the resulting chaos in the rank and file led Moscow to demand that the decision be reversed for the sake of party unity. It blamed the CPC for misconstruing its directions. Characteristically, the CPC meekly accepted Moscow’s critique.⁶⁵

To be fair, the leadership of the CPC was caught between the Comintern’s desire for larger numbers of English- and French-speaking members and the reality that the vast majority continued to be neither. They were also well aware that, as Tim Buck remarked of Canadian communists, the language organizations in Canada (particularly the Finnish and Ukrainian ones) were “not mere radical working class organizations ... they are centres for all kinds of political assistance. Political, and also economic assistance. They are real centres to which they draw the workers on the basis of language needs.”⁶⁶ The Comintern had already concluded, and the Canadian leadership agreed, that the continued lack of compliance by the language organizations

was a “very strong basis for Right danger in Canada, and a very strong basis for Right tendencies.”⁶⁷ Told that this should not preclude the recruitment of “as many as possible revolutionary immigrant workers into its ranks, and must in no way be interpreted to mean that,” district organizers knew what was expected of them.⁶⁸ They had also been warned, in vintage Third Period language, that anyone attempting “to destroy the party campaign by characterizing these aims as ‘utopian and unrealizable’ is a saboteur [*sic*], who aims at disrupting and hindering the growth of the revolutionary movement.”⁶⁹

In May 1932, the Anglo-American Secretariat was told that the membership had become “panic-stricken and somewhat passive,” and even the region’s many leftist demonstrations were not generating solid growth for the party.⁷⁰ Together, it seemed that state repression and Bolshevization had worked to demoralize the Lakehead left. Communists in the region, at first unbeknownst to both the CPC and the Comintern, began to join with Wobblies and assorted trade unionists to form a committee to organize demonstrations in Fort William and Port Arthur. A reported 2,500 workers, the largest crowd in years, attended a parade and an accompanying outdoor mass meeting.⁷¹ Joint strike committees had also begun to operate. Participation in these activities resulted in gains between 1930 and 1933.⁷² However, while numbers in the Workers’ Unity League at the Lakehead grew and the Lumber Workers Industrial Union of Canada was prominent in a number of high-profile strikes, it became clear that communists could not go on their own. As Peter Campbell has commented, “the Communists could not conduct an effective strike without Wobbly support.”⁷³ Aside from the odd strike victory, the CPC efforts to form a mass movement had been a dismal failure. Even more significant were the near-crippling losses in membership amongst Finnish lumber workers by 1934.⁷⁴ These losses profoundly affected the party’s ability to mobilize for action.⁷⁵

While communists and Wobblies were jousting with each other for members, other political parties began to take advantage of the situation. It was the entry of a candidate in the 1934 provincial election for the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) that hampered the communist ability to secure the urban labour vote, and Liberals but came close to carrying the majority of rural polls, including those dominated by Finns.⁷⁶ As A.W. Rasporich argues, Liberal Port Arthur mayor Charlie Cox “had also discovered the potency of the ‘ethnic’ vote in Port Arthur, and now extended this discovery to the rural hinterland.”⁷⁷ The communist-backed candidate received only 456 votes.⁷⁸

As I have written elsewhere, echoing Irving Abella, “1935 was the key year in the history of the Canadian labour movement; it was then that the future course of trade union movement in Canada was determined.”⁷⁹ Abella goes on to argue, the existing union movement in Canada “was felled by two crushing blows … one from Moscow, the other in Washington.”⁸⁰ A third crushing blow should also be considered. Ian McKay argues that the nature of socialism in Canada irreversibly changed in 1935. The rise of fascism would dominate left policy and actions well into the 1940s.⁸¹ “The 1934 slogan – ‘Canada is Ripe for Socialism,’” David Frank points out, “now gave way to the rallying cry of 1935 – ‘Toward a Canadian People’s Front.’”⁸² The year signified the consolidation of what Geoff Eley has described as “Radical Plannism,” which would come to dominate the Canadian left between 1935 and 1960.⁸³

Rather than the revolutionary overthrow of the existing state and the capitalist order, which was a vibrant unifying thread of much of the “second formation” of the Canadian left between 1919 and 1935, many leftists now looked to the reform of the existing Canadian state system. Such a goal was not conceptualized as a minor adjustment in social relations, but rather as part of a comprehensive program of egalitarianism. Moreover, while revolutionaries would continue to fight past 1935, other leftists whose struggles and strategies were quite different from theirs would increasingly drown out their voices.

In the spring of 1931, Tom McEwen, future head of the Workers’ Unity League, wrote bluntly to Jim Barker, one of the many organizers for the Communist Party of Canada in Northwestern Ontario: the party needed to deal with the grousing within its ranks about “non-English-speaking crap.”⁸⁴ It was McEwen’s frank assessment that, despite his own support of the Comintern’s dream of a Canadian party that was more Anglo and French, that vision was also stripping the party of some of its most ardent supporters.

Many like Harry Bryan never completely adhered to party and Comintern doctrine. A doughty proponent of and fighter for the United Front, he disapproved the class-against-class tactics of the early 1930s. He differed from the direction taken by the Comintern. Yet, one fellow traveller commented in the 1970s, he held his own counsel. He believed in the Comintern’s ultimate cause while regarding with dismay its rhetoric, which had redounded to such disadvantage in the Lakehead.

Gains made in party memberships, including amongst Anglo-Saxon workers and trade unionists, was quickly offset by an RCMP

crackdown, climaxing in the arrest and trial of eight prominent CPC leaders.⁸⁵ Added to these woes was the re-emergence of a much more active and enthusiastic IWW. Finns disquieted by Bolshevization, and some perhaps already inclined to syndicalism, began to abandon communist unions for those affiliated with the IWW. The establishment of a Canadian Administration (CA) of the IWW in Port Arthur only exacerbated the situation.⁸⁶

By the time of the Seventh World Congress of the Communist International in 1935, the communist movement had shifted from being focused on revolutionary class struggle to fighting fascism. But what did this mean? For many party members in the mid-1930s, and in the memory of those interviewed in the 1970s, the decision resulted from the rise of Adolf Hitler, the menace of fascism in Europe, and the threat of its extension to North America. Tim Buck, for example, recollects that all national parties were instructed to “discard all doctrinaire attitudes and all dogmatic positions and to recognize that the decisive key to a defeat of Fascism was working class unity, and that the only possibility for broad parliamentary advance required working class unity, and that the trade union movement needed working class unity.”⁸⁷ A.T. Hill, likewise, recalled in the 1970s that the Popular Front “became an all-embracing political fight, to defend the living standards, and also to defend the democratic organizations, free institutions, and national independence of various countries.”⁸⁸

However, an alternate, more critical, narrative is also plausible. Viewed on the Lakehead level, the new paradigm loop preceded 1935, and with it came dire implications for Lakehead revolutionaries. As John Manley has argued, “between 1935 and 1939 Popular Front imperatives forced the indefinite postponement of socialist revolution and made the party’s main objective the construction of cross-class alliances to defend bourgeois democracy.”⁸⁹ The CPC would find itself competing with organizations that did not share its philosophy and were not burdened by its intricate history.

By 1935, the social democratic CCF had already begun to supplant the CPC as the left political party of choice in the Lakehead and elsewhere.⁹⁰ Realizing this, the CPC in the 1940s attempted to convince the CCF that cooperation between it and the newly formed Labor-Progressive Party (LPP) would be the best thing for the socialist movement in the country.⁹¹ The CCF declined any such cooperation.⁹² The CCF’s position was clear. As Ontario CCF leader E.B. Jolliffe stated, his party “will have no link with the Labor Progressive Party

... just the Communist party under a new name." Further, Jolliffe told reporters in Toronto that the L.P.'s plan "of seeking affiliation with the C.C.F. is just a blind ... One of their main purposes is to fight the C.C.F. which they have been doing for a long time. We want no part of them. They have been trying to build up a political following in Canada for 23 years and have never been able to get anywhere because their policy is neither democratic nor realistic."⁹³ By 1943, the CCF accomplished at the Lakehead what the CPC had been unable to achieve for over twenty years – electoral success.⁹⁴ It was an achievement based on something that had eluded the CPC: winning the votes of both English-speaking and ethnic working-class voters. As Anthony Rasporich writes, a "considerable number of Italians, Ukrainians, Poles, and Finns ... made their way into the postwar socialist camp."⁹⁵ The Lakehead's communist moment had, for all intents and purposes, arrived at its conclusion.

NOTES

- 1 *Fort William Daily Times-Journal*, 25 June 1935.
- 2 The Lakehead comprises the twin cities of Port Arthur and Fort William, Ontario, amalgamated into the present-day city of Thunder Bay and vicinity, and so named because of its position on the north shore of Lake Superior. For overviews of the history of labour and socialism at the Lakehead before the Second World War, see Michel S. Beaulieu, *Labour at the Lakehead: Ethnicity, Socialism, and Politics, 1900–35* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2011); Jean Morrison, *Labour Pains: Thunder Bay's Working Class in Canada's Wheat Boom Era* (Thunder Bay: Thunder Bay Historical Museum Society, 2009).
- 3 *The Young Worker*, 26 January 1935.
- 4 See Ian McKay, "The Liberal Order Framework: A Prospectus for a Reconnaissance of Canadian History," *Canadian Historical Review* 81, no. 4 (December 2000): 617–45; McKay, *Rebels, Reds, Radicals: Rethinking Canada's Left History* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2005); McKay, *Reasoning Otherwise: Leftists and the People's Enlightenment in Canada, 1890–1920* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2008). Examples of other works that have engaged with the concept of the liberal order framework include, but are not limited to, Jean L. Manore, "The Numbered Treaties and the Liberal Order Framework," Aboriginal Policy Research Consortium International (APRCi) Paper 76 (2010); Jody Mason, *Writing*

Unemployment: Worklessness, Mobility, and Citizenship in Twentieth-Century Canadian Literatures (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013); and various chapters in Michel Ducharme and Jean-François Constant, eds., *Liberalism and Hegemony: Debating the Canadian Liberal Revolution* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009).

- 5 McKay, "The Liberal Order Framework," 620–1.
- 6 Ibid., 623.
- 7 John Manley, "'Starve, Be Damned!': Communists and Canada's Urban Unemployed, 1929–1939," *Canadian Historical Review* 79, no. 3 (September 1998): 487.
- 8 For more on the Finnish contribution to Canadian development, see the contributions to Michel S. Beaulieu, David K. Ratz, and Ronald N. Harpelle, eds., *Hard Work Conquers All: Building the Finnish Community in Canada* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2018). In particular, see Beaulieu, "The Finnish Contribution to Early Socialist Organizations," 29–50. For a transnational approach to the United States, see the contributions to Michel S. Beaulieu, Ronald N. Harpelle, and Jaimi Penney, eds., *Labouring Finns: Transnational Politics in Finland, Canada, and the United States* (Turku: Siirtolaisuusinstituutti [Institute of Migration], 2011).
- 9 For a complete overview, see Beaulieu, *Labour at the Lakehead*, and Morrison, *Labour Pains*.
- 10 For more on Harry Bryan, see Michel S. Beaulieu and Bruce W. Muirhead, "Harry Bryan – A Man of Fanatical Convictions," in *Essays in Northwestern Ontario Working Class History*, edited by Michel S. Beaulieu (Thunder Bay: Lakehead University Centre for Northern Studies, 2008), 53–70.
- 11 See LUA, Jean Morrison Labour History Collection (MLHC), Tape 5, Harry Bryan Reminiscences, 1972.
- 12 For examples, see *Western Clarion*, 26 September 1908, and *Western Clarion*, 30 October 1909. For more on the rejection of the Second International, see Beaulieu, *Labour at the Lakehead*, 30–5, and Norman Penner, *The Canadian Left* (Scarborough: Prentice Hall, 1977), 43.
- 13 For more on the Social Democratic Party of Canada, see Beaulieu, *Labour at the Lakehead*, 35–62; Penner, *The Canadian Left*, 47, and George R. Troop, "Socialism in Canada" (MA thesis, McGill University, 1922), 57–8.
- 14 Jean Morrison, "Community and Conflict: A Study of the Working Class and Its Relationship at the Canadian Lakehead 1903–1913" (MA thesis, Lakehead University, 1974), 197.
- 15 For Holder's comments, see LUA, Finnish Canadian Historical Society (FCHS), MG8, Series b, 7, 10, item 2, Tape, Interview with William Holder, 31 March 1977.

- 16 Bryan quoted in *ibid.*
- 17 For discussions of the internal rift over industrial versus geographic organization and the role that ethnicity played, see Beaulieu, *Labour at the Lakehead*, 65–89, and Ian Radforth, *Bushworkers and Bosses: Logging in Northern Ontario, 1900–1980* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987), 118. The Winnipeg Central Labour Council, for example, discussed the issue of industrial versus geographic organization and the issue of the lumber workers' fee in earnest in August. See Provincial Archives of Manitoba (PAM), Robert Boyd Russell Collection (RBR), MG 10-A14-2, #15, "Special Meeting of Central Labour Council," 31 August 1920.
- 18 For Angus's view, see *Canadian Bolsheviks: The Early Years of the Communist Party of Canada* (Montreal: Vanguard, 1981), 76.
- 19 For the impact of the WPC's formation on other socialist organizations, see Donald Avery, 'Dangerous Foreigners': *European Immigrant Workers and Labour Radicalism in Canada, 1896–1932* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1979), 116–17, 119; Norman Penner, *Canadian Communism: The Stalin Years and Beyond* (Toronto: Methuen, 1988), 66–7; Paul W. Fox, "Early Socialism in Canada," in *The Political Process in Canada*, edited by J.H. Aitchison (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1963), 97.
- 20 F. Borkenau, *World Communism: A History of the Communist International* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1962), 168; Milorad M. Drachkovitch, ed., *The Revolutionary Internationals, 1864–1943* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1966), 162; Peter Kivisto, *Immigrant Socialists in the United States: The Case of Finns and the Left* (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press; London and Cranbury: Associated University Presses, 1984), 68–9. For more on the Third World Congress, see J.L. Black, *Canada in the Soviet Mirror: Ideology and Perception in Soviet Foreign Affairs* (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1998), 31–2; Borkenau, 221; Tim Rees and Andrew Thorpe, eds., *International Communism and the Communist International, 1919–1943* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), 3–4. Library and Archives Canada (LAC), Communist International fonds, MG 10-K3, R14860-0-3-E, reel K-271, 495.98.4, 47; O.W. Kuusinen, letter to the Communist Party of Canada, 28 December 1921, cited in Gerry Van Houten, *Canada's Party of Socialism: History of the Communist Party of Canada, 1921–1976* (Toronto: Progress Books, 1982), 18. Although R.B. Russell of the One Big Union did attend, he was according to John Manley "roundly abused as an obstacle to working class advance, and the last slender possibility of an amicable coalescence of the two organizations evaporated." John Manley, "Communism and the Canadian Working Class during the Great Depression" (Phd diss., Dalhousie University,

1984), 12. For the Winnipeg Council's reaction to the formation of the CPC, see Provincial Archives of Manitoba (PAM), Robert Boyd Russell Collection (RBR), MG 10-A14-2, #17, "Special Meeting of Central Labor Council," 14 November 1922.

- 21 See E.H. Carr, *The Russian Revolution from Lenin to Stalin, 1917–1929*, with a new introduction by R.W. Davis (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 16. Of course, Carr is referring to Vladimir Lenin, *Left-Wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1952). See, in particular, chapter 6. For an example of inner-party discussions, see O.W. Kuusinen, letter to the Communist Party of Canada, 28 December 1921, cited in Van Houten, *Canada's Party of Socialism*, 18.
- 22 Manley, "Communism and the Canadian Working Class during the Great Depression," xiii.
- 23 For material on meetings of the Anglo-American Secretariat dealing with Canada, see LAC, R14860-0-3-E, K-269, 495.72.1-176; Ivan Avakumovic, *The Communist Party in Canada: A History* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1975), 23; J.L. Black, *Canada in the Soviet Mirror: Ideology and Perception in Soviet Foreign Affairs* (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1998), 32; and Robert C. Tucker, "The Emergence of Stalin's Foreign Policy," *Slavic Review* 36, no. 4 (December 1977): 571; Rodney, *Soldiers*, 61.
- 24 This also applied to the CPC's leadership during its first decade. For example, John MacDonald had been heavily involved in the Independent Labour Party in Ontario, and William Moriarty in the Socialist Party of Canada; Maurice Spector was on the executive of the SDPC, and A.T. Hill was a leading member of the Industrial Workers of the World in Canada. Several officials had also been involved in a variety of socialist organizations in Europe. Interestingly, aside from MacDonald and Tim Buck, none of the early leadership had much actual experience in the trade union movement. See Avakumovic, *The Communist Party in Canada*, 11.
- 25 John Kolasky, *The Shattered Illusion: The History of Pro-Communist Organizations in Canada* (Toronto: PMA Books, 1979), 115.
- 26 LUA, JMLHC, Tape 4, Interview with Helmer Borg, 1972.
- 27 LAC, Canadian Security Intelligence Service fonds (CSIS), RG 146, vol. 2, file 1025-9-9018, part 2, p. 871, RCMP, "E" Division, Re: Lumber Workers' Industrial Union, 24 April 1923. See also LAC, Communist Party of Canada fonds (CPC), MG 28-IV4, volume 11, file 11-11, "Submitted by D.E.C. District #6 to the 3rd national Convention of W.P. of C.," circa April 1924, 3.
- 28 For internal concerns over membership and how organizing had largely been ineffectual, see LAC, CPC, Reel M-7380, 8C 0112, J. MacDonald,

- “Secretary’s Report to the Third National Convention of the Workers Party of Canada,” 18 April 1924, 1.
- 29 *The Worker*, 1 November 1924.
- 30 Angus, *Canadian Bolsheviks*, 154.
- 31 See Penner, *Canadian Communism*, 73; Tucker, “The Emergence of Stalin’s Foreign Policy,” 570.
- 32 Manley, “Communism and the Canadian Working Class during the Great Depression: The Workers’ Unity League, 1930–1936,” 27. For more on this period, see 62–93.
- 33 William Rodney, *Soldiers of the International: A History of the Communist Party of Canada, 1919–1929* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1968), 81.
- 34 This was especially a concern for the Finns, as they numbered over 60 per cent of the party’s membership. With the addition of Ukrainian members and their organizations, “foreign-born” workers accounted for over 90 per cent of the party. See Avakumovic, *The Communist Party in Canada*, 35; Avery, ‘Dangerous Foreigners’, 116. For the state of the United States, see Auvo Kostiainen, “The Finns and the Crisis over ‘Bolshevization in the Worker’s Party, 1924–25,’ in *The Finnish Experience in the Western Great Lakes Region*, edited by Michael Karni, Mattie E. Kaups, and Douglas J. Ollila Jr (Turku: Institute for Migration, 1975), 174.
- 35 Rodney, *Soldiers*, 82–4.
- 36 For commentary on the Fifth Convention, see Marvin Leonard Pelt, “The Communist Party of Canada, 1929–1942” (MA thesis, University of Toronto, 1964), 28.
- 37 *The Worker*, 30 March 1929; Van Houten, *Canada’s Party of Socialism*, 57.
- 38 See, for example, Theodore Draper, *American Communism and the Soviet Russia: The Formative Period* (New York: Viking Press, 1960), 154, 159. Some historians have challenged Draper’s position. See, for example, Hugh Wilford, “The Communist International and the American Communist Party,” in *International Communism and the Communist International, 1919–43*, edited by Tim Rees and Andrew Thorpe (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), 225–33; Auvo Kostiainen, *The Forging of Finnish-American Communism, 1917–1924: A Study in Ethnic Radicalism* (Turku: Turun Yliopisto, 1978).
- 39 Draper, *American Communism*, 159; Rodney, *Soldiers*, 95; Avery, ‘Dangerous Foreigners’, 128.
- 40 Kostiainen, “The Finns and the Crisis over ‘Bolshevization’ in the Workers’ Party, 1924–25,” 172.
- 41 Angus, *Canadian Bolsheviks*, 21.
- 42 *The Worker*, 13 November 1926.

- 43 LAC, R14860-0-3-E, K-269, 495.72.21, 5; LAC, R14860-0-3-E, K-269, 495.72.34, 50.
- 44 Avakumovic, *The Communist Party in Canada*, 54.
- 45 Tim Rees and Andrew Thorpe, "Introduction," in *International Communism and the Communist International, 1919–1943*, edited by Tim Rees and Andrew Thorpe, 4.
- 46 Avakumovic, *The Communist Party in Canada*, 54.
- 47 Angus, *Canadian Bolsheviks*, 233.
- 48 Rees and Thorpe, "Introduction," 5.
- 49 Angus, *Canadian Bolsheviks*, 233; Tim Buck, *Yours in Struggle: Reminiscences of Tim Buck*, edited by William Beeching and Phyllis Clarke (Toronto: NC Press, 1977), 250–1.
- 50 McKay, *Rebels, Reds, Radicals*, 157.
- 51 Van Houten, *Canada's Party of Socialism*, 29; Angus, *Canadian Bolsheviks*, 199; and Manley, "Communism and the Canadian Working Class during the Great Depression," 41.
- 52 LAC, CPC, Reel M-7370, 1A0066, no title and 1A0088, no title, signed A. Skarra. For example, of the thirteen members of the District Trade Union Department, only three were not Finnish or Ukrainian. The District 6 Trade Union Department included in 1929 the following: A. McLeod (Port Arthur), A. Skarra (Port Arthur), J. Carey (Port Arthur), A. Hautamäki (Port Arthur), J. Chepusiak (Fort William), Steve Manaryk (Fort William), W. Perunuk (Fort William), A. Gibson (Fort William), M. Benouski (Fort William), G. Sonquist (Port Arthur), N. Law (Fort William), William Boyce (Fort William), and B. Nicolaichuk (Port Arthur).
- 53 J. Donald Wilson, "Matti Kurikka and A.B. Mäkelä: Socialist Thought among Finns in Canada, 1900–1932," *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 10, no. 2 (1978): 17.
- 54 Rodney, *Soldiers*, 115–16.
- 55 LAC, R14860-0-3-E, K-269, 495.72.34, 78.
- 56 LAC, R14860-0-3-E, K-269, 495.72.34, 86.
- 57 LAC, R14860-0-3-E, K-269, 495.72.34, 88.
- 58 LAC, R14860-0-3-E, K-269, 495.72.34, 91.
- 59 LAC, CPC, Reel M-7380, 8C 0158, "Resolution of Communist International One the Question of Communist Workers in the Ukrainian Workers' Organizations in Canada," circa October 1928, 1.
- 60 LAC, CPC, Reel M-7376, 8C 0334, J. Carey, "Discussion T. Buck's Report," circa 31 May to 7 June 1929. See also 8C 0317, Mikhalenki, "Sub-Report on Fraction Buros and Preparation for Convention," circa 31 May 1929, 3.

- 61 Avery, 'Dangerous Foreigners', 129.
- 62 LAC, R14860-0-3-E, K-278, 495.98.84, 43.
- 63 LAC, CPC, Reel M-7377, 2A 1323, A.T. Hill to The Full Secretariat, 17 February 1931.
- 64 John Manley, "Moscow Rules? 'Red' Unionism and 'Class against Class' in Britain, Canada, and the United States, 1928–1935," *Labour/Le Travail* 56 (2005): 9.
- 65 LAC, R14860-0-3-E, K-279, 495.98.98, 10-11; *The Worker*, 12 April 1930.
- 66 LAC, R14860-0-3-E, K-279, 495.98.101, 80.
- 67 *Ibid.*
- 68 LAC, CPC, Reel M-7380, 7B 2120, Communist Party of Canada, Central Agitation and Propaganda Department, "Party Recruiting Campaign," 1 April 1930, 6.
- 69 LAC, CPC, Reel M-7380, 7B 2115, Communist Party of Canada, Central Agitation and Propaganda Department, "Party Recruiting Campaign," 1 April 1930, 1.
- 70 LAC, R14860-0-3-E, K-270, 495.72.206, 7-8. In April, C.E. Watkins, chief of police in Fort William, attacked communism before the Missionary Society of St Andrew's Presbyterian Church. He outlined the recent activities and promised that firm action would be taken in the future. See *PANC*, 20 April 1932.
- 71 *The Worker*, 6 May 1933.
- 72 *The Worker*, 24 June and 1 July 1933; *FWDTJ*, 7 to 16 June 1933; *PANC*, 13, 15, and 21 June 1933; and Ian Radforth, *Bushworkers and Bosses: Logging in Northern Ontario, 1900–1980* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987), 127–8.
- 73 J. Peter Campbell, "The Cult of Spontaneity: Finnish-Canadian Bushworkers and the Industrial Workers of the World in Northern Ontario, 1919–1934," *Labour/Le Travail* 41 (1998): 144.
- 74 *The Worker*, 19 September 1934.
- 75 See Ahti Tolvanen, "Finntown": A Perspective on Urban Integration; *Port Arthur Finns in the Interwar Period 1918–1939* (Helsinki: University of Helsinki, 1985), 93.
- 76 *The Worker*, 30 June 1934.
- 77 For his 1934 campaign, Cox recruited Intola Finnish homesteader Anna Koivu who acted as a translator and "ethnic liaison" for Cox and his campaign. This worked: on the strength of the Finnish vote, Cox doubled the results of his closest competitor, Tory Don Clarke, 7,449 votes to 4,249. See Beverly Rasporich, "Anna of Intola: A Finnish-Canadian Woman with

Sisu,” in *Great Dames*, edited by Elspeth Cameron and Janice Dickin (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 196; A.W. Rasporich, “‘Call Me Charlie’: Charlie W. Cox, Port Arthur’s Populist Politician,” *Papers and Records* [Thunder Bay Historical Museum Society] 19 (1991): 8. Anna claims to have been a lifelong Conservative up until that election, demonstrating once again that socialism was not synonymous with Finnish at the Lakehead.

- 78 Rasporich, “‘Call Me Charlie,’” 8; Royal Canadian Mounted Police, *Weekly Summary Report on Revolutionary Organizations and Agitators in Canada*, no. 712 (27 June 1934) in *R.C.M.P. Security Bulletins: The Depression Years, Part 1, 1933–1934*, edited by Gregory S. Kealey and Reg Whitaker (St John’s: Canadian Committee on Labour History, 1993), 94.
- 79 Ibid.
- 80 Irving Martin Abella, *Nationalism, Communism, and Canadian Labour: The CIO, the Communist Party, and the Canadian Congress of Labour 1935–1956* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1973), 1.
- 81 Local Communist efforts, until the party was banned during the Second World War, appear to have gone into the Lumber and Sawmill Workers’ Union and the League against War and Fascism.
- 82 David Frank, *J.B. McLachlan: A Biography* (Toronto: James Lorimer and Company, 1999), 501.
- 83 See Geoff Eley, *Forging Democracy: The History of the Left in Europe, 1850–2000* (New York: Oxford University Press 2000), 240–1; Ian McKay, “For a New Kind of History: A Reconnaissance of 100 Years of Canadian Socialism,” *Labour/Le Travail* 46 (Fall 2000): 95–109; and McKay, *Rebels, Reds, Radicals*, 169–83. For more on the CCF and the communist perspective, see LAC, R14860-0-3-E, K-288.
- 84 LAC, CPC, Reel M-7377, 3A 1602, National Secretary, Workers’ Unity League to Jim Barker, 3 April 1931.
- 85 For more on RCMP arrests during this period and the activities of the Canadian Labour Defence League, see LAC, CSIS, vol. 6, file 1025-9-9103, part 1, p. 0521, “Report of the Plenum on the Canadian Labor Defense League,” 7–8 August 1932, 1; LAC, CSIS, vol. 6, file 1025-9-9103, part 1, p. 0502, RCMP Western Ontario District Report, 10 August 1932.
- 86 For more on the Canadian Administration of the IWW, see Michel S. Beaulieu, “Spittoon Philosophers or Radical Revolutionaries? The Canadian Administration of the Industrial Workers of the World, 1932–35,” *Ontario History* 105, no. 2 (Autumn 2013): 183–211.

- 87 LAC, Tim Buck Collection (TBC), vol. 1, series 63, "Tim Buck Reminiscence, Session 15," 1965–66, 597.
- 88 A.T. Hill, "Basic Highlights of Labor History – Lakehead and Canada" (c. 1970), 5. This anti-fascism was of particular concern for many workers at the Lakehead due to the right-wing extremism favoured in some quarters of the two cities. In January 1935, for example, *The Worker* reported the organization of the "Italian Blackshirts." Modelled directly after Mussolini's blackshirts, they had begun a campaign to organize all Italian workers, a segment of the local population that had not become heavily involved in either the Trades and Labour Councils, the CPC, or the IWW in the region. See *The Worker*, 19 January 1935.
- 89 Manley, "Starve, Be Damned!," 487.
- 90 For more on the CCF, see James Naylor, *The Fate of Labour Socialism: The Cooperative Commonwealth Federation and the Dream of a Working Class Future* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016).
- 91 Led by Tim Buck, the LPP's executive had a strong Northwestern Ontario presence with Bruce Magnuson and A.T. Hill on the executive. See "Answers C.C.F. Leader on Labor Progressive Tie-up," *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, 24 August 1943.
- 92 Ibid.
- 93 Ibid.
- 94 The LPP did achieve success federally with the election of Fred Rose in Montreal in a 1943 by-election and general election in 1945.
- 95 LUA, Fred Robinson Papers, 1949; Anthony Rasporich, "Twin City Ethnopolitics: Urban Rivalry, Ethnic Radicalism and Assimilation in the Lakehead, 1900–70," *Urban History Review* 18, no. 3 (February 1990): 222.

Henri Gagnon, Tim Buck, Stanley Ryerson, and the Contested Legacy of the Comintern on the National Question

The Crisis of French-Canadian Communism in the 1940s

Ian McKay

The Comintern sent mixed signals to the Communist Party of Canada (CPC) with regard to the French/English dimension of the “national question.”¹ Although to a contemporary eye Canadian history raises national *questions* rather than one national *question*,² after 1928 the party focused closely on the relations between French Canada, which in much of its analysis was pretty much reducible to francophone Quebec,³ and the Anglo-Canadian majority. Despite making up more than a third of the country’s European-descended population and including a large, severely exploited industrial working class, francophones did not participate in the secretive gathering that inaugurated the CPC in 1921. Its Toronto-based leadership often overlooked them.⁴ Reminding Canadians of the role French Canada had played in resisting the wartime policy of military conscription in 1917–18, the Executive Committee of the Communist International sent the party tough communications in 1929 scolding it for neglecting French Canada and warning it against treating French Canadians as it had the diaspora groups, such as the language minorities (most prominently Finns, Jews, and Ukrainians) that made up the majority of Canadian communists.⁵ Rather, the party was told to hold out to the French-Canadian masses the promise of “complete self-determination.” It advised the party that it was obliged to “set to work amongst the

French Canadian masses of Quebec,” which was the “most exploited section of the Canadian working class.” The exact Comintern instructions came in the form of a closed letter to the party’s leaders: “The struggle for free and full independence for Canada, the guarantees for complete self-determination (French Canada) can only be achieved through revolutionary action. We must emphasize the fact that the main struggle in this connection should not be at the present moment the abstract struggle for independence, but should be concretized around the struggle against being dragged by the Canadian bourgeoisie or any section of it in either of the imperialist camps [into] the coming war.”⁶ It was entirely appropriate for *nationalistes* to see in these instructions (which plainly drew upon the encouraging example of French-Canadian resistance to military conscription) an acknowledgement of the existence of their nation, entitled to be a self-determining and anti-imperialist presence in the wider world. It was also entirely fitting for the party’s largely Anglo leadership to interpret them as rendering any assertion of either Canada’s or French Canada’s independence wholly contingent upon external circumstances – in this particular instance, the looming “war danger,” and in a more general sense the perceived security needs of the Soviet state. Such would be the fate of the national question as it was interpreted by the Comintern and passed on to the communists in Canada. It was always to be interpreted and re-interpreted in light of global politics, with the “principle” of national self-determination subordinated to the pragmatics of domestic and geohistorical politics. There was almost infinite scope here for theoretical *and* political conflict.⁷

Down to the 1950s, Quebec was the setting for a ferocious campaign on the part of the dominant Catholic Church and the provincial government to eradicate the minuscule local communist menace, a campaign that some sober-minded observers thought presaged, if it did not actually represent, full-fledged fascism.⁸ After the ascension of the ultra-authoritarian premier Maurice Duplessis in 1936, the repression worsened.

It was only after the late 1930s that the communists, confined as they mainly were to such minority groups as Jews and Ukrainians, managed to become a discernible if numerically modest factor within the francophone majority, at least in working-class east end Montreal. The coming of the Popular Front in 1935 allowed the communists to enter youth and anti-war movements that appealed to many young French Canadians. Although the Nazi-Soviet Pact in 1939 cost the

party supporters in English-speaking Canada, its opposition to the British Empire's "imperialist war" gave the now-illegal party some significant traction in Quebec, where its anti-war stance allowed for a rapprochement with the province's *nationalistes* and the recruitment of significant French-Canadian cadre. The equally drastic line change in 1943, requiring that the party declare its 100 per cent support for a war it had earlier disparaged, was presented to French Canadians as one that did not entail a return to the detested policy of military conscription.⁹ And although the party's startling by-election victory in the federal riding of Montréal-Cartier in 1943 was principally the work of Jewish-Canadian communists, winning candidate Fred Rose was also the beneficiary of significant French-Canadian support. If communist spirits were downcast by Rose's subsequent arrest on dubious espionage charges in 1946, they were elevated by a spectacular and largely French Canadian-oriented campaign for veterans' housing in 1946–47, which won the Montreal Reds worldwide attention. Moreover, communists seemed keen to engage with the "Canada question," publishing a full-length study entitled *French Canada* and promoting a patriotic story about two allied "nations" permanently cooperating to build a more progressive Canadian state. It seemed that after more than two decades of Comintern grumbling about the inattentiveness of the Canadian party to the country's "most exploited section of the Canadian working class," the Canadians and Canadiens had finally gotten their act together.

Then, in 1947, the party leadership abruptly acted so as to demolish its fledgling francophone base, perhaps 500 strong, in Montreal. Exploring the puzzle of why it did so helps us grasp not only the rationale behind this seemingly mysterious and self-destructive decision, but also some of the reasons why so many people found an ostensibly promising set of Marxist tools for the national question a source of perplexity and frustration. This chapter focuses on the three communists centrally implicated in the crisis of 1947: Montreal organizer Henri Gagnon (1913–1988), party leader Tim Buck (1891–1973), and historian Stanley Ryerson (1911–1998). It concludes with some reflections on the complexities of the national question as it was formulated by the Communist Party of Canada.

Many of the party's accomplishments in the 1940s were the work of Henri Gagnon. He was born in Montreal's working-class east end and as a young electrician was the sole wage-earner for a family of eight. The Comintern archives shed light on his dynamism as an

organizer of *La ligue de la jeunesse communiste* (Young Communist League), whose post-1938 French moniker testified to the growing presence of francophones within it. For a time, the LJC/YCL offered a place where young anglophones and francophones could work together *égal à l'égal*, beyond Montreal's notorious "two solitudes" of anglophones and francophones. They collaborated in the work of building a large peace movement (in a productive if tumultuous relationship with the *Association catholique de la jeunesse canadienne* which distressed the anti-communist archbishop of Montreal), and in such activities as language classes, ping-pong tournaments, and dances. Gagnon, the sparkplug behind much of this energetic cultural work, at times sounded almost like a New Leftist from the sixties: if you truly wished to make communism a living presence in Montreal, speak the language of most Montrealers, immerse yourself in their cultural milieu, and talk to young people still observant in their Catholic faith. (From the late 1930s comes rich evidence in the Comintern papers of such eyebrow-raising moments as young communists wondering if a priest could bless their red flag, and members needing to break off social engagements in order to attend mass.¹⁰) And put your practical talents to work – in Henri's case, by using his skills as an electrician to help impoverished Montrealers steal power from the monopolistic Montreal Light, Heat, and Power Company (something he wryly called an anticipatory form of "social insurance").¹¹ Well into the 1940s, Gagnon retained the air of a tempestuous young French Canadian from east end Montreal, grounded in his place and well integrated into his society.

The communists' extensive contacts with *nationalistes* took on a new importance after 1939. Militants in the now-illegal party established high-level, secret contacts with many leading French-Canadian activists in the fight against conscription. Under the editorship of Gui Caron, the future leader of the provincial party, the anti-war newspaper *La voix du peuple* reached a readership Gagnon estimated as high as 100,000, and while its columns were open to a full spectrum of francophone opinion, communists (including Gagnon) vetted its columns. After going underground for a time, after 1941 Gagnon was one of a group of leading communists who turned themselves in to the Canadian authorities and who were, despite the party's continuing illegality, allowed to throw themselves into helping the war effort. Gagnon then joined the Army and worked as an expert on explosives at an Ontario training camp. He argued that the party's pro-war line

did not require compulsory conscription, which he opposed and thought might actually impede a total war effort.¹² It was a position that suggested both his pragmatic awareness of the linguistic and cultural realities of his country and city and his principled conviction that leftists had to support the war – a “principled pragmatism” that was the touchstone of his political life.

When Gagnon answered the party’s postwar call to return to Montreal as its provincial organizer, he also brought with him, thanks to the Canadian Army’s overbearing Anglo culture, a heightened understanding of the cultural bias of Canadian Confederation. (With a primary-school education, Gagnon could speak some English, but he never became fully comfortable speaking the language and his writing skills were imperfect.) On the party’s urging, he threw himself into organizing *La ligue des vétérans sans-logis*, which between October 1946 and June 1947 organized roughly seventy families – all together about 300 fathers, mothers, and children, most of them francophone and very few of them communist – in a vigorous campaign to protest homelessness in the city. These “squatters” occupied a series of properties (unoccupied houses, an old hotel, then gambling dens or “barbottes,” finally even an army barracks) in a campaign that generated headlines across Canada and well beyond. The campaign achieved concrete results, likely prompting the city to do more on housing. But its primary significance was that it was one of Montreal’s largest social protests in the 1940s, one that highlighted the irrationalities of capitalism and used the patriotic figures of returned veterans to do so. From Gagnon’s perspective, this grassroots struggle showed that the storm-tossed communist party could still accomplish big things in the world. From the perspective of his enemies, it smacked of anarchism, individualism, and disorder – and it is entirely possible that the raids on the gambling houses also raised the prospect of exposing respectable party members to scandal. It is suggestive that as soon as the housing struggle reached the “barbottes,” his party superiors advised Gagnon to suspend it. And it is equally revealing that he refused to do so – and prevailed, albeit at the cost of some bad feeling among disgruntled comrades. Toronto’s communist *Canadian Tribune*, unlike the Montreal daily newspapers or even an international publication like *Time Magazine*, barely noticed *La ligue des vétérans sans-logis*. Like sections of the Montreal party, the *Tribune* seemed almost embarrassed by such an explicit challenge to a Liberal government with which communists desperately wanted to form a “national front.”¹³

That grand communist scheme of a pan-Canadian Liberal-communist alliance, floated from 1943 to 1947 without arousing much in the way of enthusiasm from the reigning Liberals, explains at least some of the tribulations of Gagnon and the east end Reds. The party wanted national influence. Ever since 1937, the communists had increasingly backed measures of constitutional reform that would bolster the strength of the government in Ottawa, which was very tentatively embarking on the construction of a partial welfare state. Often they disregarded any notion that such centralization might be threatening to French Canadians, many of whom cherished the considerable degree to which Quebec exercised sovereignty over such important matters as education. Gagnon began to read up on the constitution and formed a reading group in east end Montreal. At a National Committee meeting in early 1947, Gagnon criticized visions of the centralization of powers in Ottawa and declared, to a hushed room, that he was not willing to sign a blank cheque to Prime Minister Mackenzie King's Liberal government.¹⁴

In 1947, Gagnon signed up for a communist summer school in Ontario, which he thought was going to facilitate a long-delayed discussion of the constitutional implications of the national question. Instead, attendees were "instructed." The important and timely issue of the Canadian constitution was reserved for an address by leader Tim Buck. When, channelling Lenin, Gagnon remarked that the remodelling of the constitution should be accompanied by an emphasis on French Canada's self-determination, he was informed by leaders Buck and Ryerson that he was playing into the hands of the arch-reactionary Catholics and *nationalistes* who dominated the Quebec government. Apart from that, the school focused, apparently in English only,¹⁵ on Canadian labour history and other matters. Gagnon would later be severely censured for failing to participate properly in the school – he seemed disengaged and left early. That he might have felt out of place, in an English-language setting with only three other francophones to keep him company, was never mentioned. According to one plausible account, it was after Gagnon left the school prematurely to return to Montreal that the party's leaders decided to purge "the Gagnon group."¹⁶

That summer and fall, Montreal's francophone communists were engaged in intense well-attended seminars focused on the British North America Act, Canada's key constitutional document: for how could rank-and-file communists adopt a proper position unless they understood the constitution of their own country? Yet not only was

there no real grassroots consultation about this core question, the text of leader Tim Buck's May 1947 declaration on it was, as of early October, unavailable in French.¹⁷

Gagnon also noticed that the party in Quebec was courting, with ever-greater earnestness, the respectable members of the middle class. A distinct "intellectuals' group" had been formed of people who "in view of their profession and their social position ... could not militate in the party as any ordinary members," and felt themselves in a position to "proceed with the education of the members of the party." Thus, remarked Gagnon, "those fortunate enough to receive a 'good education' (formal bourgeois educations) could get the party members to benefit from it." From his perspective, such middle-class members also stood to "learn from those very comrades they wanted to educate."¹⁸ It was a subtle position well removed from the party leaders' myopic courting of respectability.

The Montreal atmosphere became toxic. Expressions and even gestures were pounced upon for indications of an underlying malign intention. In one of his rare appearances in the party press, Gagnon polemicized against Premier Duplessis. The authoritarian politician was a "false" nationalist. Aha! – proclaimed his sharp-eyed critics. Gagnon had failed to understand the ABCS of Marxism on nationalism. He had cited bourgeois authorities on the constitution, he had used ambiguous expressions, and the very term "false nationalism" implied that there could ever be such a thing as a "true nationalism!" All true Marxists knew that nationalism was everywhere and always a bourgeois ideology, and as such constituted a discrete belief system to be rejected in its entirety.¹⁹ Moreover, it was whispered, for all his east end credentials, background as a militant, and blue-collar occupation, Gagnon was nonetheless *no worker*, having never been charged to organize an industrial union. (Gagnon disputed the allegation and critiqued the economicistic assumptions behind it, which implied that the party could rest content with an industrial working-class base).²⁰ Sometime before the fateful Congress, Gagnon remembers, he received a call from a militant in the office of the communist-linked Canadian Seamen's Union: "Several persons from the French section are being aimed at and ... they are ready to make a 'Job on You'" – that is, orchestrate his expulsion, perhaps under threat of coercion.²¹

The phone call fit into an atmosphere thick with rumours and innuendo. The Quebec party's October Convention 1947 was

uproarious. On its second day, provincial leader Gui Caron brought in what was called the “secret resolution.” It condemned three francophone members for being nationalists. It added that Henri Gagnon himself, allegedly their leader, was guilty of poor work habits and nationalistic sentiments. Gagnon would also later be accused of anti-Semitism – a deadly charge indeed, given the city’s numerous Jewish communists and the province’s long history of anti-Semitic agitators and far-right French clerics, whose premier had recently won re-election in 1944 with an anti-Semitic campaign. (No allegation of anti-Semitism against Gagnon was even approximately confirmed). Gagnon remained in the hall, but the absence of genuine discussion and the manipulation of voting results for the Executive Committee had made him feel physically ill: “I was so disgusted with what was going on and has been going on before the Congress, that I got cramps in the stomach … the last events killed the absolute confidence I had in the infallibility of certain comrade leaders.” He declined to be nominated for the Provincial Committee.²² Soon he was expelled.

For the next nine years, he would agonize over the Convention of 1947. For a time he led his own small free-standing *Parti communiste du Canada français*, an enterprise that was predictably controversial among established party members. He finally won reinstatement into the party, just in time for the even bigger explosion of 1956, which largely finished off what had remained of the French-speaking communist contingent from the crisis of 1947. Gagnon’s rehabilitation came too late.

Why did Gagnon fall from grace? The local explanations seem obvious: because he differed with the Canadian party over its enthusiasm for a centralized constitution; he could be accused of being a “nationalist”; he had fallen afoul of the party’s respectability-seeking leaders in Montreal and would never fit comfortably into their intellectual salons; and he had been tagged, falsely, with anti-Semitism in a city whose left was strongly Jewish. His remarkably successful veterans’ campaign could be condemned as mere showmanship and the *nationalistes* he recruited during it could be seen as interlopers. One reading, then, of 1947 is that the crisis constituted the working-out of personal rivalries and Montreal’s complicated linguistic and ethnic divisions.

But on a more transnational level – that of the communist movement as a whole – the downfall of Gagnon can be explained by different considerations. And to explore these, we might first turn to the

likely motivations of Tim Buck, Canada's almost perpetual national communist leader, answerable to Moscow and the key interpreter of its policies to the party.

For the crisis of 1947 would not have happened without the leader's consent, and it required his active participation. Within their own realms, vested with the authority of mediating Moscow's instructions to "sections" of the party in an increasingly Stalinized and top-down movement, such party leaders exercised much power. Tim Buck is the one communist of the day whom some twenty-first-century Canadians still remember. His reputation was solidified by his imprisonment in Kingston Penitentiary, where he was (probably) the target of an attempted assassination. Upon his release, he was greeted with rapturous crowds from coast to coast: on John Manley's estimate, Buck, who "proselytized on a heroic scale," visited every region between January and May 1935, spoke in at least thirty-five towns and cities, and racked up a total audience of more than 100,000.²³ A hero to many Canadians in the 1930s, he was also sufficiently familiar with the ins and outs of politics in Moscow that, unlike a legion of other communist leaders in the world, he was able to hold on to his position from 1929 to 1962.

Buck was born in Suffolk, England, trained as a machinist, and immigrated to Canada in 1910. His Anglo-Canadian nationalism found early and eloquent expression in the 1920s. When he first explored the "national question" in 1925, he drew upon the writings of liberal nationalists, not Marxists, and made no effort to enrich the contemporaneous communist campaign for Canadian independence with Marxist concepts. It is not at all clear that he had much interest in, or even read much about, French Canada. His 1925 essay on "Canada and the British Empire" overlooked it entirely. Buck's manuscript notes on "Independence" contained this comment, with regard to potential allies for Canadian independence: "French Canadians: Not to be exaggerated. Anti-British tendencies, also chauvinistic tendencies. Against fighting Britain's wars, against France's wars also. See in BNA protection [of] their peculiar interests (language, religion, schools). Must be shown that Independent Canada would give same liberties and guarantees."²⁴ Under his leadership, and despite clear instructions from the international, the Canadian party demonstrated only intermittent interest in Quebec. In one landmark brief to the government in 1938, and in flagrant disregard of the Comintern edict of 1929, the party presented French Canadians as a linguistic

“minority” suffering from “semi-feudal influences,” which could be corrected only by “complete national unification.” The “self-determination” promised them in 1929 was nowhere in evidence. The CPC suggested instead that traditional provincial rights be set aside in order to achieve “economic progress and social security for the Canadian people as a whole.”²⁵ Canadian nationalism was central to Buck’s political identity. He consistently championed the slogan “Make Canada Independent.” (He had to keep quiet about it in the 1930s, when the slogan was no longer favoured). In a hagiographical 1957 memoir of him, Oscar Ryan relates that when asked to give his “favourite motto” Buck chose “Keep Canada Independent.”²⁶ It was an independent *Canada* that was to exercise self-determination, not the nations that found themselves, willingly or otherwise, within it.

Nations, once seen as historical phenomena to be analyzed and eventually transcended in the interests of global working-class unity – a consistent theme in Lenin, Trotsky, and the young Stalin – came to be conflated with “nation-states” throughout the communist world after the mid-1930s. In the 1940s an emphasis on a unified, independent Canada, defending its homeland against a predatory imperialist United States, aligned clearly and obviously with the perceived security needs of a Stalinized USSR. “Our first loyalty has been, is, and always will be, to the true national interests of our country – Canada,” proclaimed the LPP in 1944. This “United Independent Canada” motif was everywhere in communist texts of the 1940s and 1950s – with the map of Canada and the endlessly reproduced maple leaf constant visual reminders of Canada’s wholesome naturalness.²⁷ The “nation” of the communists’ national front now bore little resemblance, as a category, to that developed by Lenin or even by the young Stalin. It had become, rather, the “sovereign nation-state,” endowed with its own personality and interests, playing its part in a re-imagined world system. In that system, exemplified by the Tehran agreement of 1943, a unified Canada, it was fondly hoped, might function as an indispensable lynchpin linking the Soviet Union, the United States, and Great Britain. This “Canada’s” interests should trump those of the many peoples contained within it.

Although it might seem that Buck would have easily taken to the nationalist communist climate of the 1940s, in fact the waters in which he was paddling were treacherous. Buck deeply admired, indeed even echoed, Earl Browder, the leader of the US party. Buck’s communist “Canadianism” echoed Browder’s slogan, “Communism is

Twentieth Century Americanism.”²⁸ Browder had served as the Comintern’s emissary to Canada and the party’s honoured guest at its Eighth Dominion Conference, where he delivered an address on “North America and the Soviet Union: The Heritage of Our People.” The speech made not the slightest concession to the existence of different sovereign states on the continent, spoke of the US constitution as though it should inspire all North Americans (i.e., “Our People”), and only made one mention of the fact that he was speaking in another country.²⁹

When the Canadian party was outlawed again during the Second World War, Browder facilitated Buck’s exile in the United States, where (on Buck’s own account) the American leader deeply influenced the Canadian leader’s views on world affairs.³⁰ The exiled Buck faced competition from a triumvirate in Canada seemingly poised to challenge his leadership. This alternative leadership was associated closely with *nationaliste* opposition to the British Empire, one that even permitted underground publications to hint at an imminent armed struggle against the imperial authorities.³¹

In April 1945, an article printed above the signature of French leader Jacques Duclos, although likely written in Moscow and possibly with the active collaboration of Stalin himself, appeared in *Cahiers du Communisme*, the French party’s theoretical journal. It was an all-out critique of Browder. He was expelled in February 1946. In addition to abandoning the ideal of the communist party exercising a privileged leadership role, Browder’s sins included a neglect of theory and the subordination of the class struggle to Americanism. Even more worryingly for Canadians, Browder was condemned for interpreting the Tehran Declaration as a blueprint for a new world order and “international labour-management co-operation.”³² Although the Labor-Progressive Party the communists had established in 1943 had also gone a long way to dissolving time-honoured communist organizational precepts and had put out the welcome mat to middle-class professionals, Buck, luckily for him, had never taken Browder’s fateful final step of formally replacing the Leninist vanguard party with a loose “association.”³³ Yet his organizational and intellectual connections with Browder were plain as day. He could be convicted on any number of charges, “liquidationism” and “bourgeois nationalism” not least among them. Leaders had been dismissed by Moscow for far less serious deviations. How could he avoid suffering Browder’s fate? He might escape punishment because he was less important to

the Soviet party, because he had always proved to be its extremely loyal supporter, and – perhaps – because he managed to project onto Gagnon and his French-Canadian supporters the sin of nationalist deviation of which Gagnon was almost entirely innocent but Buck almost entirely guilty. Buck and the Canadian party could be shown to be on the *qui vive* when it came to rooting out the “bourgeois nationalists,” the villains *du jour* in the world communist bloc.

If the crisis of 1947 could not have happened without Buck, Stanley Ryerson was its co-author. Somewhat involved in the early 1930s in radical circles at the University of Toronto,³⁴ Ryerson had been more fully radicalized as a student of literature at the Sorbonne in Paris. After his return to Canada, Ryerson assumed a lectureship in French at Sir George Williams College in Montreal, a post he combined with activism in the Communist Party of Canada. His major publications on Quebec began with *1837 – The Birth of Canadian Democracy* and *Le Réveil du Canada français* (both 1937). In them, Ryerson sought to identify the history of French Canada with that of popular democracy. He linked a greatly simplified history of the Canadian people rising up unitedly in the 1830s against their oppressors with concurrent struggles against fascism in Spain, where Canada’s battalion was named after Louis-Joseph Papineau and William Lyon Mackenzie, key leaders in the nineteenth-century rebellion.

Ryerson was a senior party leader and had in the early 1940s figured as one of the three-person organizing committee that, in Buck’s absence, had run the Canadian party. Ryerson claimed both British and French descent, and at various points he was S.B. Ryerson, Stanley Bréhaut Ryerson, Stanley-Bréhaut Ryerson, and Étienne Roger – under which last name, as Gaspé-born communist Évariste Dubé remarked, he became known to “thousands of French-Canadians.”³⁵

As was typical of many communist readings of nationalism, Ryerson’s interpretation of Quebec was strongly economicistic. It emphasized the province’s backwardness and the attendant consequences – unemployment, low wages, and high infant mortality. It regarded an emphasis on French-Canadian exclusion from the positions at the top of Quebec society as a myth perpetuated by rightists indulging in “cries of nationalistic hate.”³⁶ Those who boasted so loudly of their nationalism were often, in fact, the servants of those who served the trusts, “Les Trustards.”³⁷ Any claim to be an “oppressed race” or “people” was plainly false. And those who preached a return to older artisanal or agrarian way were indulging in a fantasy. Among

them one found not only the dictatorial premier Duplessis but also the contemptible Liberals, headed by Liberal leader Adélard Godbout (“Gandhi-Godbout.”) The pope, the local church, the nationalistic Montreal press – all were culpable of complicity with fascism.³⁸ Even mainstream nationalists might be, on this reading, fascists in embryo.

Then with the Hitler-Stalin pact, the line changed – and so, dramatically, did Ryerson’s line on French Canada. Under the pseudonym E. Roger, Ryerson eloquently wrote, in the early 1940s, of “notre pays,” which “s’est trouvé sous le contrôle d’une classe dirigeante profitarde, rapace, capitaliste, toujours prête à marchander la char à canon canadienne contre les profits et contrats de guerre impérialistes.” The text generally made use of “Canadienne” and “Canadien” in their original, Quebec-centred sense – *Canadien* had initially meant a French-speaking inhabitant of the St Lawrence Valley – and few readers would have been in doubt about the identity of the “notre pays” of which M. Roger spoke when he invoked Quebec’s motto, “Je Me Souviens.”³⁹ Here, an innocent reader might have thought, one heard an authentic voice of “French Canada,” crying out in defense of his nation.⁴⁰

Ever since the imposition of military conscription in the First World War, opposition to a repeat of any such policy had overwhelming support within the Quebec populace, most of whom had little direct interest in the British Empire. Obviously seeking to play a role in any mass anti-war movement, communists were also faithfully fulfilling Comintern instructions. To mobilize French Canadians against the imperialist war, Roger wrote passionately of French Canadians being convoyed through the ominous grey brine of the Atlantic, many of them to die on the battlefields of a distant continent. Whatever Prime Minister Mackenzie King might promise, their plight presaged the coming of the “blood tax” or “slavery” that went under the name of conscription. They were suffering so that the profiteers might prosper. French Canadians should understand “how Imperialists had betrayed the nation” – namely, French Canada.⁴¹ “Our homeland,” Roger/Ryerson proclaimed, had been repeatedly betrayed by the imperialists, driven to ruin and popular misery in order to enrich a small minority of profiteering millionaires. He reminded his readers that on three earlier occasions – 1899–1902, 1914–18, and 1939–40 – the blood of Canadiens had been spilled in foreign conflicts unleashed by the imperialists of Downing Street – all because “our land” found itself in the hands of a greedy ruling class, always ready to profit from the sale of cannon fodder as they pursued imperialist war contracts.⁴² Some might

attempt to defend conscription in the name of democracy, but it was in fact a form of slavery imposed in the name of liberty.⁴³ Roger/Ryerson used the charged *nationaliste* phrase “la survivance” when he wrote of what the French Canadians had achieved since 1837.⁴⁴ He repeatedly and favourably quoted from the *nationaliste* Henri Bourassa, whose *Que devons-nous à l'Angleterre* offered apt denunciations of imperialist culture. The country was being given over to carnage in the name of a supposed “Canadian nation” – Roger/Ryerson put the phrase in scare quotes and it obviously referred to something other than *la nation canadienne* – but by resisting such a betrayal, French Canadians could be guided toward their full emancipation. The pamphlet concludes with all-caps rallying cries: “Resistance to Conscription – By Everyone and By Every Means! Remember 1917–18!”⁴⁵ Roger/Ryerson sounded a lot like a left-wing version of the legendary politician and orator Bourassa, and “by every means” had a special resonance in a city where anti-conscription struggle had historically involved mass violence and state repression.

By 1944, the line had changed again. Roger the ultra-*nationaliste* became Ryerson the Canadian nationalist. In *French Canada: A Study in Canadian Democracy* (1944),⁴⁶ the communists’ most ambitious book-length publication to date, Ryerson 3.0, so to speak, had calmed down. One must first underline the book’s High Browderism – which suggests some of the ways Ryerson and Buck, for all their glaring differences on opposite sides of the party’s internal clashes of 1939–41, were united by the war effort. To a degree that would have startled earlier Marxists, “the nation” and “the state” became indistinguishable.⁴⁷ And “Canadianism,” ill defined but vividly evoked, permeates the text.⁴⁸

French Canadians, urged three years earlier to rise up angrily against militarist insults to their/our nation, were now presented as potential if reluctant participants in the “democratic Canadianism” of a cross-class national front. The “pusillanimous appeasement” of the provincial government had shamefully weakened the pro-conscription forces, denying “left-wing labor forces” a “far more favorable result,” namely a more resounding vote in the 1942 referendum (conscription was rejected by about 80 per cent of Quebec voters).⁴⁹ In the spirit of Browder – in whose view every founder of the “young democracy” of the United States, from slave-owner George Washington onwards, should be revered by leftists as a hero⁵⁰ – Ryerson lionized those French-Canadian leaders who had realized that their nation’s destiny lay with

an integral Canadian nation that had achieved a coast-to-coast democracy. Papineau had to make room for more respectable figures in the pantheon. Even Premier Godbout of Quebec, dismissed as a clueless romantic only a few years earlier, could be redescribed as a man who had “voiced the patriotic Canadianism of his people.”⁵¹

Conversely, the *nationalistes* who were once given abundant attention in *La voix du peuple* and so warmly courted in Ryerson/Roger’s *La conscription* now came in for thundering condemnation. Ryerson would later modify these judgements and come to a more nuanced view – his simplistic characterizations of them made him “squirm” in retrospect, he wrote in 1980.⁵² But in 1944, he sharply distinguished between patriotic Canadians defending the nation and those *nationalistes* dividing it. Rather than seeing Canada as an inescapably plural country – ethnically, linguistically, and nationally – the text deploys a strategy of seeing cultural and political difference as disease. The “inner canker of national strife” was a menace to Canada, threatening to hold us “in backward impotence.”⁵³ An inner canker is something to cure, not accommodate.

Ryerson did not think French Canadians should become Anglos. French-Canadian nationalism was deep seated, had sometimes played a valuable role in history, and was probably a permanent fact of Canadian life. It was important to recognize, Ryerson said – he was favourably quoting a contemporary commentator – that the “two great and distinct races” of Canada were not going to “merge in our time and perhaps never,” that all questions between them “must be settled in recognition of this fact and in the light of history,” and that the “assumption that these ways will soon change, or can be made suddenly to change, or that one race will finally overwhelm the other” was false.⁵⁴ One can also see why the book could be read as a treatment sympathetic to nationalism, yet such marginal concessions to Canada’s obvious cultural realities, in essence an acquiescence to the status quo, were hardly out of keeping with the book’s overwhelming emphasis on building a Canadian nation.

No less than Buck, Ryerson in the mid-1940s was an advocate of an organic, integral Canadian nationalism – one that saw “Canada” not as an outpost of empire, a congeries of many distinct groups and nations, or a liberal project of rule, but as an integrated and solid national entity, poised to take its place in the world. How could one square this with either Lenin or the young Stalin? Lenin, after all, had politically insisted on the national right to self-determination, even

in the case of relatively small nations; Stalin, more ontologically inclined, had specified four criteria of nationhood, all of which Quebec (but not Canada) seemed easily to meet.⁵⁵ As a good Leninist, Ryerson affirmed that French Canadians had the “right as a nation to choose their own form of state.”⁵⁶ But, fortunately, they had *already* exercised that right – seemingly forever – and chosen to be part of the integrated state now proving its mettle in the world.

Long ago, said Ryerson, French Canada as a nation had won “the essentials of political equality within the Canadian federal state.”⁵⁷ As for other forms of equality, Ryerson noted that the French Canadians still suffered from grave problems, but this was largely the fault of their “feudal past,” not of the liberal order they shared with other Canadians.⁵⁸ And the correction of these disabilities would come about through economic struggles waged by workers across Canada, regardless of ethnicity or language, to raise wages and living standards. In Ryerson’s case, the national question was important as a way of grasping what was wrong with French Canadians, not of understanding demands they might reasonably make upon a party sworn to revolutionize the political order. In essence, the national question had already been politically solved in Canadian politics in the 1840s–1860s. Apart from supporting reform movements to equalize wages and living standards across Canada, there was little to which communists needed to pay attention when it came to French-Canadian nationalism.⁵⁹ They certainly did not need to rethink the political fundamentals of the Canadian state.

One can readily see why, in addition to the communists hailing *French Canada* as the latest word in historical materialism, Liberal prime minister William Lyon Mackenzie King took the time off from the war effort to personally write Ryerson and congratulate him on his fine unity-building book. Ryerson, wrote King, seemed to share his own understanding of the “spirit of democratic Canadianism.”⁶⁰ Ryerson returned the compliment in a 1944 pamphlet. Opposed by a cabal of businessmen and Tories, the Tehran agreement of Churchill, Stalin, and Roosevelt had been upheld by that exemplar of democratic Canadianism, Prime Minister King. He had nobly withstood “imperialist Jingo sentiment” and personified the “*united* effort” required by the war, especially in his work at the recent London Commonwealth Conference, where he had stood by “the policies of world co-operation for world security and prosperity,” that is, those championed at Tehran.⁶¹

Ryerson's transnational evocation of the "Spirit of Tehran" was of a piece with Browder's writings and suggested the ways in which a turn to the global could provide ideological cover for a position on Canadian unity that effaced class and national distinctions. The high point of Ryerson's Browderism came in *Two Peoples, One Land, One Future*, brought out in 1944 as a party pamphlet. Communists now called upon "the united efforts of labor, business, and the whole democratic camp" to work for "national unity in Canada." "Democratic Canadianism" required nothing less. True, Ryerson emphasized that Canada was made up of two nations. But both nations were required to achieve "national unity in Canada," in part by remedying "national inequality," the term Ryerson generally used to denote Quebec's economic lag behind Ontario. Ryerson sang the praises of democratic Canadianism. A "happy, post-war Canada" depended on cooperation: "we must work together, shoulder to shoulder, just as loyally and resolutely as our lads are fighting over there. Nothing less will do. Anything less will mean disaster." Whenever the "two peoples, two national communities" worked together, "they've been able to do great things; but whenever a self-seeking, profiteering clique has been able to stir up mutual distrust and friction and antagonism, French against English-speaking, English against French, both peoples have suffered, and only the sowers of hate have profited." The pamphlet's cover illustration depicted both "nations" as two look-alike factory workers in classic socialist realist style. Not only did they share a common interest, but they seemed to be identical twins. Thus, it both affirmed deep-seated ethno-cultural difference (there were *two* twins) and negated it (they were essentially interchangeable).⁶²

After the war, such hyper-caffeinated patriotic rhetoric was modulated and, especially after 1946, the Liberals were no longer potential friends. Browder's disgrace made plain the price Moscow might exact if red nationalists seemed to go too far and call the leadership of the Soviet party into question. Ryerson had to adjust his stance once again. In 1946, Ryerson published a lengthy article on "The National Question and Canadian Imperialism."⁶³ Gagnon, if he read this theoretical piece – there is scant evidence he did so – would have found in it a scathing denunciation of the practice of openness to *nationalistes* that he (along with Gui Caron and Ryerson himself) had preached and practised with the party's full blessing in the early 1940s. Ryerson's firm Leninist declaration on behalf of a nation's "right to secede, to form a separate state should its people so desire," was so qualified

that readers might well conclude that French Canadians possessed this abstract “right” – but only on the condition that they never exercised it. Selectively citing writings from Lenin that emphasized the subordination of the demand for self-determination to the imperative of preserving an uncorrupted proletarian consciousness, Ryerson insisted that a good communist might endorse the independence of a given country but would generally subordinate particular to general interests. And this policy might well require that country to amalgamate with a bigger, more developed neighbouring state. Each movement for national independence had to be judged according to how it might contribute to world revolution.

In the Canadian case, where on Ryerson’s telling English-speaking Canadians of “mixed national origins” made up 70 per cent of the total while French-speaking Canadians descended from absolutist French Canada made up but 30 per cent, there was no confusing the particular with the general. As had been the case for Engels and for Stalin, it was up to the far-sighted communists with their superior understanding of history to distinguish progressive claims to national independence (generally those of big, economically developed states) from petty claims put forward by others (minor parochial states with laggard economies). National demands are “relative, conditional, while the proletarian aims of overthrowing capitalism and achieving the victory of the working class is absolute and unconditional.”

A sharp line of demarcation separated “petty-bourgeois nationalism” – which considered French Canada an oppressed nation, of the sort one E. Roger (i.e., Ryerson) had so vividly described a few years earlier – from the views of true Marxists, for whom all such considerations opened the door to reaction. It was the duty of Marxists to remind French Canada that its “historic task” was not that of “a bourgeois-democratic struggle to *open the way* to capitalist development, but is one of finding the avenues of approach to the decisive, final *abolition* of capitalism, in French as in English Canada.” Only on the basis of that understanding was it “possible for us to approach correctly the tactical problems of alliances with the petty-bourgeois masses, with sections of the nationalist camp which are prepared to struggle against monopoly, against imperialism. And such alliances are an imperative necessity, if people’s unity is to be achieved in French Canada.” They might be undertaken in the case of opposing preparations for another war. They could not be countenanced in accepting nationalist qualms about a centralizing overhaul of the

Canadian constitution. Those who argued that it was “tactically necessary” to talk to such nationalists in the interests of avoiding isolation, thereby communing “with the masses,” were simply mistaken. (It is hard to avoid the suspicion that Ryerson, who had targeted Gagnon explicitly at a party meeting earlier in the year, had his future purge victim in mind when he wrote such passages). Likely they were “petit-bourgeois” (the term, pervasive throughout the communist world when it came to denouncing nationalists, occurs no fewer than ten times in the one article). Perhaps they were enemies, engaged in the “betrayal of the nation.” It was an incongruous phrase to find in a text that roundly declared, in italics, “*But we are not nationalists.*”⁶⁴ Gagnon, once praised by Ryerson in *French Canada* as an “outstanding” leader who had demonstrated his devotion to “the cause of Canada’s survival,”⁶⁵ was now categorized as just such a petit-bourgeois nationalist, placing his nation ahead of the party and progress in the postwar world.

The party’s seemingly suicidal purge of the French-Canadian communists can be explained in terms of local politics. Gagnon had likely stepped on many toes in his grassroots activism, in an atmosphere characterized by uneasy relations between anglophones and francophones and worsened by the recent downfall of Fred Rose, the city’s most prominent Jewish-Canadian left politician. It can also be situated with respect to Buck’s uncertain leadership of the party, made more precarious by his blameworthy Browderism. Here was a local kerfuffle, fought in part over local ethnic issues, accelerated by Gagnon’s having infringed upon the jealously guarded turf of Jewish leftists (themselves bitterly divided between social democrats and communists), quite possibly sparked by the intrepid militant’s invasion of the *barbottes*, and suffused with the ambient paranoia and distrust permeating Red Montreal in 1946–47. Here, too, was a Canadian brouhaha, as the party sought to adapt the politics of the national front to the postwar world and hoped, with ever-diminishing plausibility, for a partnership with the Liberal government. Gagnon could be seen as so much roadkill on the communists’ never very believable highway to political and cultural respectability.

But it also unfolded on a transnational level. In the communists’ vision of the mid-1940s, a unified Canada (a verifiable nation with its own state, self contained, singular and proud) might act to further the communists’ global vision, a new global order foreshadowed by the Tehran agreement and instantiated in the United Nations. The

narrow and divisive claims of nationalists were secondary to the imperatives of forming of a new Canadian state, one that would in turn offer support for the worldwide objectives of an increasingly Moscow-dominated and top-down communist movement. Just as from 1939–41 the communists' pitch to French-Canadian nationalism was calculated in part to weaken the British Empire's "imperial war," so this new Canadian nationalism can be seen as an attempt to fit Canadians into a Cold War narrative in which they might figure as staunch pro-Soviet resisters against the new American empire. As the communists' many detractors pointed out, a nationalism responding so closely to the interests of the USSR was an odd duck indeed. As it was put to work by numerous and often conflicting activists and theorists, the "Marxist theory of the nation," as the Canadians first engaged with it in the 1920s and then in the ever-more-Stalinized Comintern of the 1930s and 1940s, turned out to be almost as prone to dizzying, top-down line changes (and for sincere militants like Gagnon, dismaying ones) as the foreign policy of the Soviet Union.

When the Montreal press started to speak of Gagnon as Canada's Tito,⁶⁶ many communists would have felt justified in their earlier distrust of him. Yet Gagnon was not even the mildest version of Marshall Tito. Even the label "nationalist" fits him loosely. He was not, to put it bluntly, either petit-bourgeois or even much of a *nationaliste*, except in the sense of being interested in seeing the French Canadian minority survive and flourish – a goal he shared with the vast majority of his fellow francophone Quebecers. He was, first and foremost, a local grassroots French Canadian communist in east end Montreal who wanted to put Marxist theory to work to transform his world. If he gradually became adept at arcane theoretical disputes, to the point of being able to echo the Comintern's Georgy Dimitrov as he lobbed charges of "national nihilism" against his opponents,⁶⁷ in truth theoretical abstraction was never his *métier*.

From the 1920s on, the communists had wrestled – in almost entirely Eurocentric terms that overlooked the numerous native peoples encompassed by the project of settler colonialism⁶⁸ – with the national peculiarities of the Canadians. Sometimes, "interference" from the Comintern might be better seen as "inspiration." This was the case when the Comintern in 1929 reminded the party that Canada contained within its borders a large, culturally distinct, and cruelly oppressed group. On the insistence of the Comintern, Canadian communists tried to establish a base within Quebec, and modestly

succeeded – only to later sacrifice it on the altar of political and ideological orthodoxy. Explaining why they did so has required a complexly layered account that takes account of the many scales – local, national, and global – on which this story unfolded. The global movement had become far more top-down and centred in Moscow – notwithstanding the formal abolition of the Comintern in 1943 – than it had ever been in the 1920s.

Tom Nairn has a valid point in decrying the conceptual void on nations and nationalism within the Marxist tradition.⁶⁹ It was a problem little rectified by Lenin and Stalin. The first, in prioritizing politics, paid homage to self-determination only to allow communists to, in essence, forget about it until it served the world movement's interests as they perceived them. The second, who supplied a seemingly clear and easy-to-follow recipe for determining the “nationness” of any supposed nation, in fact offered vague criteria open to contradictory interpretations and susceptible, as his latter career revealed, to highly xenophobic and patriotic readings. This is not to deny that Marxists put the theory to some interesting work, as they struggled with the nations and nationalisms they encountered. The creative ones often had a rough ride. As in the case of Gagnon, whose thought and practice most closely resembled Antonio Gramsci's in its willingness to start with an open reckoning with concrete historical realities without instantly typecasting them, they often found themselves on the defensive against those armed with supposedly scientific certainties. The Comintern in 1929 can be admired for prompting some Canadians to reflect on a national question that remains of central significance to any future left-wing “Canada” – but it must also be said that its orthodox answers to “the question” caused perplexities and divisions among those who ventured to base their politics upon them.

NOTES

- 1 The communists went under a variety of labels in the first half of the twentieth century – the Workers' Party of Canada, the Communist Party of Canada, and the Labor-Progressive Party – but throughout this chapter I will simply use the word “party” to refer to their primary organization, on the assumption that these parties were all part of one communist movement.

- 2 As a white settler dominion oppressing native peoples, formed through a top-down process of state formation that marginalized many pre-existing nation-like entities, with a plethora of immigrant diaspora cultures marginalized by Anglo hegemony, and, finally, seemingly incapable of either becoming a fully sovereign state or a clear-cut colony, Canada has generated many nationalisms, none of which has succeeded in naturalizing its version of the country's past, present, and future. A "Canadian nation" with an agreed-upon birthdate, destiny, and pantheon of heroes has yet to emerge.
- 3 There are sizable francophone populations outside of Quebec, but by and large, "French Canada" had this somewhat simplified sense in communist discourse.
- 4 The party's draft resolution for its annual convention in 1929 failed even to mention the question of French Canada.
- 5 For invaluable background on the party in Quebec, see Andrée Lévesque, *Virage à gauche interdit: Les communistes, les socialistes, et leurs ennemis au Québec, 1929–1939* (Montréal: Boréal Express, 1984); *Red Travellers: Jeanne Corbin and Her Comrades* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2006).
- 6 Library and Archives Canada, Comintern Papers, R14860-0-3-E, K-276, 495.98.67, 21. My thanks to Oleksa Drachewych for putting this important passage in broader perspective.
- 7 In this, as the introduction to the present volume suggests, the Comintern was loyal to the teachings of Lenin.
- 8 The classic account is Lévesque's indispensable *Vintage à gauche interdit*, 7. For an interesting primary source, see Earle Birney, "Is French Canada Going Fascist?," in *Conversations with Trotsky: Earle Birney and the Radical 1930s*, edited by Bruce Nesbitt (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2017), 249–60. An astute exploration of the moral panic induced by the right among social democrats is provided by Sean Mills, "When Democratic Socialists Discovered Democracy: The League for Social Reconstruction Confronts the Quebec Problem," *Canadian Historical Review* 86, 1 (March 2005): 53–82. For rich analyses of the conflicts between Depression-era leftists and the far right, see Christine Elie, "The City and the Reds: Leftism, the Civic Politics of Order, and a Contested Modernity in Montreal, 1929–1947," (PhD diss., Queen's University, 2015); Elliot Hanowski, "A Godless Dominion: Unbelief and Religious Controversy in Interwar Canada" (PhD diss., Queen's University, 2015).
- 9 Henri Gagnon, *Les militants socialistes du Québec, d'une époque à l'autre* (Saint-Lambert, Quebec: Les Éditions Héritages, n.d. [1985]), 139. This

point is contested in some of the secondary literature on the Quebec party. See Robert Comeau and Bernard Dionne, *Les communistes au Québec 1936–1956: Sur le Parti communiste du Canada/Parti ouvrier-progrès* (Montréal: Les Presses de l’Unité, 1981).

¹⁰ See Elie, “Reds,” chap. 6.

¹¹ Gagnon, *Les militants*, chap. 8.

¹² Ibid., 137.

¹³ Ibid., chap. 12. The housing struggle is analyzed from different perspectives by Marc H. Choko, “Le Mouvement des Squatters à Montréal 1946–1947,” *Cahiers d’Histoire* 2, no. 2 (printemps 1982): 27–39; Magda Fahrni, *Household Politics: Montreal Families and Postwar Reconstruction* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), chap. 6.

¹⁴ Université du Québec à Montréal, Service des Archives et de Gestion des Documents, Fonds Henri-Gagnon (hereafter FG), 54P2/11, Henri Gagnon, “Review of 1947–1950,” 10. This document was drawn up in collaboration with the Labor-Progressive Party.

¹⁵ We cannot be sure, of course, that no French was spoken at the school, but the syllabi remaining in Gagnon’s papers are all in English. FG, 54P2/11.

¹⁶ Merrily Weisbord, *The Strangest Dream: Canadian Communists, the Spy Trials, and the Cold War*, 2nd ed. (Montreal: Véhicule Press, 1994), 183.

¹⁷ Henri Gagnon and the Parti Ouvrier Progressif, “Review of 1947–1950,” FG, 18. It appeared one week before the provincial congress.

¹⁸ Ibid., 15.

¹⁹ Henri Gagnon, “Discussion sur les relations fédérales-provinciales,” *Action* (Septembre 1947), and Oscar Roy, “Les relations fédérales-provinciales: Discussion sur les points soulevés par le camarade Gagnon,” *Action* (Septembre 1947), in FG, 54P2/17.

²⁰ Actually, he worked for a period after his demobilization from the Army on 4 May 1946 as a communist organizer during a textile strike in Hochelaga. Henri Gagnon and the Parti Ouvrier Progressif, “Review of 1947–1950,” FG, 5.

²¹ Ibid., 15.

²² Ibid., 15–19.

²³ John Manley, “‘Communists Love Canada’: The Communist Party of Canada, the ‘People’ and the Popular Front, 1933–1939,” *Journal of Canadian Studies* 36, no. 4 (Winter 2002): 68.

²⁴ Cited, Norman Penner, *The Canadian Left: A Critical Analysis* (Toronto: Prentice-Hall, 1977), 110.

²⁵ As Penner remarks, what is startling about this formulation is that it calls upon Ottawa to “enforce the rights of the minority by invading provincial

jurisdictions in the area where the “minority” is, in fact, the “majority” – and people, one might add, who in the main were (and are) quite attached to the notion that Quebec should enjoy autonomy in the spheres allocated to it by the constitution. *Ibid.*, 115–16.

- 26 Oscar Ryan, *Tim Buck: A Conscience for Canada* (Toronto: Progress Books, 1975), 268. Buck was playing a game called Confessions. Playing the same game in the nineteenth century, Karl Marx had chosen a rather different motto, “De omnibus dubitandum” – i.e., “Doubt Everything.”
- 27 For an illuminating discussion of the map as logo, see Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London and New York: Verso, 1983), 175.
- 28 James G. Ryan, *Earl Browder: The Failure of American Communism*, second edition (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2005), 147. See also Earl Browder, *The Future of the Anglo-Soviet-American Coalition*. This pamphlet is the text of the speech delivered by Earl Browder, general secretary of the Communist Party, at a meeting held in Manhattan Center, New York City, 2 September 1943 (New York: Workers Library Publishers, 1943).
- 29 Tellingly, this one reference to Canada merely served to condemn the members of the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation as divisive Trotskyists because they allegedly did not agree with the “people’s front.” Earl Browder, *North America and the Soviet Union: The Heritage of Our People* (New York: Workers Library Publishers, 1937), 14.
- 30 Tim Buck, *Yours in Struggle: Reminiscences of Tim Buck*, edited by William Beeching and Phyllis Clarke (Toronto: NC Press, 1977), 295; for an account based on little-consulted archival documents, see Norman Penner’s account in *Canadian Communism: The Stalin Years and Beyond* (Toronto: Methuen, 1988), chap. 6.
- 31 Penner, *Canadian Communism*, 167–8.
- 32 Ryan, *Browder*, 247.
- 33 In contrast with the United States party, the Canadian still remained illegal for the duration of the war. This fact may help explain this difference: in order to function in the formal political realm at all, the communists needed to create a new party, not dissolve themselves into an association.
- 34 See Nancy Butler, “Mother Russia and the Socialist Fatherland: Women and the Communist Party of Canada, 1932–1941, with specific reference to the activism of Dorothy Livesay and Jim Watts” (PhD diss., Queen’s University, 2010).
- 35 Évariste Dubé, foreword to Stanley B. Ryerson, *French Canada: A Study in Canadian Democracy* (Toronto: Progress Books, 1944), 9.

- 36 E. Roger [Stanley Ryerson], *Le Reveil du Canada Francais* (Montreal: Les Editions du Peuple, 1937), 4.
- 37 Ibid., 6.
- 38 Ibid., 19, 27, 28, 30.
- 39 Stanley Ryerson [E. Roger], *La conscription, c'est l'esclavage* (n.p. [Montreal], n.d. [1940]), 2–3. The motto, in common currency after the 1880s on monuments in the province, was officially adopted by the Duplessis regime in 1939. It is now ubiquitously found on Quebec license plates. Precisely what exactly “I remember” is left up to the imagination.
- 40 By 1978, Ryerson, now a professor at Université du Québec à Montréal (UQAM), defined himself unequivocally as an “Anglo-Canadian.” Stanley Ryerson, “Préface” to *Capitalisme et Confédération: Aux sources du conflit Canada/Québec*, translated by André d’Allemagne (Montréal: Les Editions Parti Pris, 1978), 12.
- 41 “Comment les Impérialistes ont trahi la Nation”: Stanley Ryerson [E. Roger], *La conscription, c'est l'esclavage* (n.p. [Montreal], n.d. [1940]), 3, 19.
- 42 Ibid., 3.
- 43 Ibid., 14.
- 44 Ibid., 4.
- 45 Ibid., 24. The original reads: “RESISTANCE A LA CONSCRIPTION! – PARTOUT, ET PAR TOUS LES MOYENS! SOUVENEZ-VOUS DE 1917-18!”
- 46 Stanley Ryerson, *French Canada: A Study in Canadian Democracy* (Toronto: Progress Books, 1944). It also appeared as *Le Canada français: Sa tradition, son avenir* (Montreal: Les Editions La Victoire, 1945) and was reprinted with a new introduction as late as 1980. Quotations in the text are from the 1944 edition.
- 47 Stanley B. Ryerson, *French Canada: A Study in Canadian Democracy* (Toronto: Progress Books, 1980), 173–4. Even though Ryerson himself sometimes quibbles with the persistent slippage from “nation” to “nation-state” to “state,” i.e., the attribution to nations of unified personalities pursuing their interests in the world, he nonetheless commits this sin repeatedly.
- 48 Ibid., 52. There is even glowing praise for the “Canadianism” of Conservatives George-Étienne Cartier (1st Baronet and Montreal bourgeois par excellence), and for Prime Minister John A. Macdonald, promoter of the monopolistic Canadian Pacific Railway (62).
- 49 Ibid., 180, 195.
- 50 See Earl Browder, *Victory – And After* (New York: International Publishers, 1942).
- 51 Ibid., 180.

- 52 Ryerson, Preface, *French Canada: A Study in Canadian Democracy*, 3rd ed. (Toronto: Progress Books, 1980), 6.
- 53 Ryerson, *French Canada* (1980), 226.
- 54 Ibid., 18.
- 55 One of the first attempts to apply Stalin's criteria for nations – language, territory, common economic life, and psychological makeup – was undertaken by Fred Rose in 1935. He concluded that French Canada was *not* a nation, on the grounds of lacking a “common economic life.” Cited in Penner, *Canadian Left*, 112–13. It is striking how little Ryerson made use of Stalin's work in the 1940s. Was he perhaps conscious that, interpreted literally, it provided a very different approach to the conceptualization of the nation – one from which Stalin himself was in full retreat after the mid-1930s? For a highly suggestive study, see Erik van Ree, *The Political Thought of Joseph Stalin: A Study in Twentieth-Century Revolutionary Patriotism* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 275–6: “In the 1940s, the dictator became obsessed with the preservation of ‘national dignity.’ In the era of ‘anti-cosmopolitanism,’ internationalism was reduced to no more than a footnote to ‘patriotism.’ National and state self-reliance became foundation stones of cultural and scientific policy. This xenophobic turn was stimulated by the patriotic upsurge during the Second World War and by the outbreak of the Cold War.”
- 56 Ryerson, *French Canada* (1980), 63.
- 57 As suggested by its title, Ryerson's *Unequal Union: Confederation and the Roots of Conflict in the Canadas, 1815–1873* (Toronto: Progress, 1970), represented a dramatic revision of these opinions. It was translated as *Capitalisme et Confédération* (Montreal: Editions Parti pris, 1978). Ryerson, who became a professor at UQAM, enjoyed considerable influence among sovereignty-inclined leftists in the 1970s and supported the pro-sovereignty side in the first great referendum debate in 1980.
- 58 Ibid., 177.
- 59 In *A World to Win: An Introduction to the Science of Socialism* (Toronto: Progress Books, 1946), an ambitious long textbook on Marxism for use in the party schools, Ryerson spent almost no time on the national question, except to announce that “French-Canada is at last on a genuine footing of equality with English-speaking Canada: the alien power of the trusts and their French speaking confederates no longer stifles the free development of the national community on the St. Lawrence” (72).
- 60 William Lyon Mackenzie King to Stanley Ryerson, 4 September 1944, Université du Québec à Montréal, Service des Archives et de Gestion des Documents, Fonds Stanley-Ryerson, 27Po30/6.

- 61 Stanley Bréhaut Ryerson, *Two Peoples, One Land, One Future* (Toronto: Labor-Progressive Party, 1944) [Federal Election Talks Series: Number Two], 5.
- 62 Ibid., cover, 3–5, 165.
- 63 Stanley Bréhaut Ryerson, “The National Question and Canadian Imperialism,” *National Affairs Monthly* 3, no. 10 (October 1946), 296–303.
- 64 Ibid., 296–303, citations at 300, 302.
- 65 Ryerson, *French Canada* (1980), 219–20.
- 66 Gérard Filion, “Les Titos du Canada français,” *Le Devoir* (Montreal), 13 juillet 1949.
- 67 Henri Gagnon and the Parti Ouvrier Progressif, “Review of 1947–1950,” FG, 21.
- 68 See Sara McCleary, “‘We Have No Literature Dealing Specifically with the Indian Problem’: CCF and CPC Responses to National Aboriginal Politics, 1920–1950,” (unpublished research paper, 2011). For highly suggestive readings of the emergence of a left among the First Nations, see Scott Rutherford, “Canada’s Other Red Scare: Indigenous Anti-Colonialism and the Anicinabe Park Occupation,” in *The Hidden 1970s: Histories of Radicalism*, edited by Dan Berger (Rutgers University Press, 2010), based on his PhD dissertation at Queen’s University; and William Robert Langford, “‘Helping People Help Themselves’: Democracy, Development, and the Global Politics of Poverty in Canada, 1964–1979” (PhD diss., Queen’s University, 2017), which notes the ways in which First Nations radicalism was influenced by the emergence of transnational “Fourth World” theorists.
- 69 Tom Nairn, *Faces of Nationalism: Janus Revisited* (London: Verso, 1997).

Nationalism and Internationalism in Chinese Communist Networks in the Americas

Anna Belogurova

One of the most fascinating examples of transnationality in the Comintern can be found in the history of the Chinese immigrant communist organization *Meizhou Huaqiao fandi datongmeng*, the American Chinese Anti-Imperialist Alliance (CAIA). The CAIA can be considered a Comintern non-party “front organization,” operating as part of what Bernhard Bayerlein referred to as the “Cultural International.” They were not especially centralized and they “acted in a slightly independent way within the national or transnational framework” of the Comintern, Soviet politics, and communist parties.¹ Fredrik Petersson suggests that it is misguided to see the broader League against Imperialism (LAI), the most well known of such anti-colonial organizations, as a Soviet propaganda tool.² Such movements might be more meaningfully compared with contemporary NGOs than assimilated into a Cold War pattern of exclusively emphasizing their manipulation by a distant Comintern, as popular as this form of analysis still proves to be.³ As the editors of this volume stress, reducing the history of international communism to its negative side risks missing “the ideals, and the genuine desires of leftists worldwide as they struggled to sort through the manifold and distinctive national, colonial and racial questions raised by their specific contexts.” The CAIA shows that not all important Comintern currents were directed from Moscow. It was, in fact, rather a good example of an attempt to realize a *transnational* revolutionary vision, one that required intellectuals and activists to develop horizontal networks that tied them together with a sense of common purpose without much in the way of direct Moscow involvement.⁴

The CAIA, headquartered in New York, flourished from 1930 to the late 1930s. It suggests the new perspectives that open up if we shift our focus away from Europe to China, Chinese communities, and the many auxiliary organizations of the Comintern. Rather than seeing the activists in these movements as dupes of Moscow, we come to see them as people using the Comintern's general platform as a launching pad for the specific anti-imperialist projects of the Chinese diaspora. For a portion of this transnational community, the Comintern's internationalism dovetailed with Chinese anti-Japanese resistance campaigns. The CAIA did follow shifts in the Comintern line and embraced conventional stances with regard to the "Defence of the Soviet Union," but it was noteworthy primarily because it nurtured a synergy of Comintern interests and those of immigrant Chinese who, especially after Japan's invasion of Manchuria in 1931, were focused on resisting Japanese aggression. Transcending the Eurocentrism that still characterizes many Comintern histories allows us to paint a more nuanced, if inevitably more complicated, picture of the anti-colonial movement.

For Chinese communists, many organizational and ideological resources were mobilized for the sake of the anti-Japanese resistance after 1935. The Chinese fraction of the Communist Party of the USA (CPUSA) coordinated organizations, under the guise of anti-imperialist leagues, across Latin America, Canada, and elsewhere. Rather than merely encouraging an abstract Moscow-centric "internationalism," the CAIA encouraged the Chinese to attach themselves to local revolutionary struggles, a "transnational" strategy endorsed by the Comintern. Chinese communists used the CAIA to build organizations affiliated with the Chinese Communist Party; they also developed overlapping and hybrid networks where the interests of the Chinese overseas, the Comintern, and the CCP joined together. Nationalism and this form of internationalism were not polar opposites but influenced each other.⁵ This chapter focuses particularly on the CAIA's vision for the Western hemisphere, with specific reference to struggles in the United States, Canada, and Cuba.

THE COMINTERN, ANTI-IMPERIALIST LEAGUES, AND CHINESE COMMUNIST ORGANIZATIONS

In order to grasp the complex world in which the CAIA operated, it is necessary to appreciate the complicated legacy that it inherited from

organizations and campaigns that long predated 1917. The first Anti-Imperialist League was established in the United States to protest against the annexation of Cuba in 1898.⁶ Around the same time, Chinese intellectuals, focused on solving China's problems and establishing a world of independent nations, were active in multi-ethnic anti-imperialist organizations in East Asia (such as societies in Japan and Shanghai).⁷ In much of the post-Versailles world, in which trans-national nationalist organizations searched for an alternative world order, embracing various forms of internationalism and promoting a world of sovereign and equal nations,⁸ nationalism coexisted with internationalism.⁹ When Nehru participated in the League against Imperialism, he did not consider nationalism and internationalism to be mutually exclusive.¹⁰ When in 1924, in his foundational lectures on nationalism, Sun Yat-sen declared that China should return to its historical policy of opposing the strong and helping the weak (*jiruo fuqing*) and supporting small (*ruoxiao*) nations, he might be said to be a "Chinese nationalist," but he was no less an "internationalist," since his vision encompassed the establishment of a confederation in Asia capable of standing up to European colonialism.¹¹

Many Chinese émigrés could warm to Sun's vision, and not only because it described a better world order. It spoke to how some perceived the Chinese state as having failed to protect Chinese overseas from discrimination by the governments of their new home countries. And, especially in the years 1923–27, when Sun's government in Canton entered into a far-reaching agreement with the Soviets, it paved the way for Soviet and Comintern influence in China. Diasporic networks around the world maintained a lively transnational press and organized around local conditions at sites of settlement, supported multi-locational social and political organizations, and coordinated transnational boycotts over race and immigration issues.¹² The Chinese GMD government promoted unity among the populations of the oppressed colonies and the overseas Chinese, who were oppressed by the governments of those colonies.¹³

Were such diasporic movements Marxist, nationalist, internationalist, local, or all of the above? Were they "transmission belts" whereby directives were set to work in particular areas (as some in Moscow may have hoped)? Or were they launching pads for activists networked across state boundaries and, in some cases, seemingly opposed ideological frameworks, who were unified by an interest in bettering China? This already complicated picture became even more so with

the breakdown of Comintern/GMD relations in 1927. It would be difficult to overestimate the importance of the GMD as the leader of anti-imperialist Chinese intellectuals in the early-to-mid-1920s. Not only was Comintern money and the Workers International Relief fund associated with Willi Münzenberg important to earlier groups such as the Hands-Off China Society, but so was the GMD: indeed, at the Brussels inaugural congress of the LAI in 1927, no fewer than one-fifth of all representatives came from the GMD.¹⁴ The Chinese GMD government attempted to play a bigger role in the world revolution¹⁵ when Hu Hanmin, a GMD official who was allegedly following Sun Yat-sen's wish, hoped to convert the Comintern into a global *minzu guoji* (international of nations), with the GMD playing a leading role in the "international national revolutionary movement" (*lingdao guoji de minzu geming yundong*) as a Comintern member.¹⁶ From this angle, the LAI was similar in its structure to a *minzu guoji*, uniting the anti-colonialists of the world, with explicit references to Sun Yat-sen and with strong participation by the Chinese GMD. At the Brussels congress, Chinese GMD and Comintern cadre Liao Huanxing quoted Sun Yat-sen's plea that the GMD unite with the oppressed classes of the West and the oppressed nations of the world to oppose oppressors and imperialists.¹⁷ The LAI network became the communication channel and model for Chinese communist organizations in the United States and the Americas. The first Chinese communist organization in the United States, the Chinese-language fraction (*Meigongdang zhongyang fushu Zhongguoju*), was established by Shi Huang and two others in 1927, under the guidance of the anti-imperialist committee of the American party after contact with the LAI network.¹⁸ Ji Chaoding came up with this idea after returning from his role as a representative of the Students' Society for the Advancement of Sun Yat-senism in America and the American Anti-Imperialist League at the LAI congress in Brussels.¹⁹ In the Americas, the members of the Chinese fraction of the CPUSA, within the CAIA, embraced the regional imagination of the American empire and used the CAIA to build party organizations in the Americas. This was a Comintern strategy worldwide. In 1925, the Comintern authorized the American Communists to reestablish the All-American Anti-Imperialist League (AAAIL, 1898–1920). Even if, by 1927, the AAAIL existed only on paper, it was an indication of just how completely communists hoped to inherit an earlier legacy of anti-imperial activism.²⁰

The Communist/GMD break in 1927 propelled the Chinese fraction to struggle to absorb the energies and organizations of leftist GMD organizations in the United States, Canada, Cuba, and Mexico. One instrument in this campaign was the Alliance for the Support of the Chinese Workers and Peasants Revolution in America (ASCPRA),²¹ first established in San Francisco. Its Philadelphia branch undertook the publication of *Chinese Avantgard* in 1928.²² Here was an influential publication that united diasporic activists throughout the hemisphere. In 1929, ASCPRA joined the LAI and participated in its second congress in Frankfurt.²³ Also formed in 1928, the All-American Alliance of Chinese Anti-Imperialists established an Oriental Branch of the American Anti-Imperialist League in 1929, uniting Asian immigrants. In 1930, it was renamed the CAIA and soon moved its headquarters to New York City.²⁴

Undoubtedly some of this new organizational capacity reflected the wishes of Moscow. Wang Ming, the Moscow liaison for the Chinese section of the CPUSA,²⁵ was important in shaping the strategy of Chinese communists in the hemisphere. In 1933, he suggested that the Chinese fraction of the American party should become the center of Chinese overseas work in the Americas, and should organize Chinese in Mexico and Canada by recruiting avant-garde members of the AAAIL into the party and by establishing local CCP cells.²⁶ Chinese communists would thus help staff this regional Comintern organization by establishing connections between the Chinese fraction and CCP chapters in Cuba, the Philippines, Canada, Chile, Mexico, and Peru, as advised by Wang Ming.²⁷ The Chinese fraction in the United States also served to connect the Comintern's network with the CCP, as a Chinese Comintern cadre asked the Chinese fraction to forward the materials from the CCP to Moscow or Paris.²⁸ The Chinese party in Europe sent Comintern publications to Chinese communists in the United States, who sent copies of their newspaper to Europe and developed connections with Southeast Asia.²⁹ The Chinese fraction was to aid the parties in the Americas in organizing the Chinese, but was not to build local parties in Mexico or Canada – the same line the CCP pursued in Java, Siam, and Borneo out of Singapore.³⁰ The goal of Chinese communists in the United States was to organize the Chinese and to lead an alliance of Asian communists. They would wrest from the GMD the banner of the Chinese Revolution and national revival, working within a

complicated alliance based on existing Chinese networks and Comintern-created institutions.

Chinese Avantgard provides the most telling evidence of the CAIA's activities and regional imagination. It achieved a widespread circulation, even in areas not usually identified with high levels of communist activism among the Chinese. It surfaced in British Columbia, which, along with correspondence in the Comintern Archives linking activists in Canada with the Chinese fraction of the CPUSA, suggests the emergence of a hemispheric vision.³¹ In essence, their geopolitical perspective was based, ironically enough, on the Monroe Doctrine. As Chinese cadres of the Comintern, in particular Wang Ming, saw things, it was right and proper that a faction of the US party should provide counsel, inspiration, and even leadership to the Chinese diaspora throughout the Americas.³² Similarly, in the Nanyang region in Southeast Asia, Chinese communists embraced the notion of China as a benevolent patron of the area, even as they followed Comintern directives concerning the best way to organize communist organizations there. In mounting their campaigns against imperialism, the Chinese communists often internalized some of the boundaries of the empires they contested.

CHINESE COMMUNISTS CAMPAIGNING FOR THE RIGHTS OF CHINESE

Chinese Avantgard promoted the Comintern line; that is, it supported a world revolution and internationalist support for revolutionary struggles around the world, as well as campaigns for Chinese rights. For example, the newspaper followed the Comintern policy of anti-war propaganda and reported on wars in Latin America between Bolivia and Paraguay (1932–35) and between Peru and Colombia (1932–33), as well as the suppression of communists in Peru.³³ It also promoted the defense of Javanese workers because, at the time, the Comintern was making efforts to revive the Indonesian Communist Party, the PKI (Partai Komunis Indonesia). Beginning in 1933, the newspaper devoted significant space to the soviet area in China's Jiangxi province and the elections there,³⁴ and to the defense of the Soviet Union. Yet Chinese communists, while advocating revolution, also promoted campaigns for the rights of Chinese in the United States, Canada, Cuba, and Malaya. *Chinese Avantgard*, similar to Nanjing-era propaganda publications

targeting Chinese overseas in the Nanyang, reported on life in Chinese communities around the world, including reports about the oppression of Chinese in the Nanyang,³⁵ the Pan-Asianism of the Nanjing government, and the overall importance of the Chinese Revolution in the world revolution.³⁶

In different Chinese communities, such as the small American,³⁷ Canadian, and Cuban ones and the larger Malayan one, Chinese communists could not attract a following because they offered a radical method of dealing with anti-Chinese discrimination which local Chinese may well have considered dangerous under the circumstances. American exclusion laws (1882) limited the presence of Chinese in the country and denied them American citizenship. Members of the community were confined to jobs in laundries, domestic service, restaurants, and Chinatown stores, and many turned to China for political support.³⁸ As in Malaya and Singapore, Chinese communists in the United States had difficulty explaining to workers involved in traditional Chinese mutual aid and trade associations that they were being exploited,³⁹ for they “usually [became elements of the] bourgeoisie or petty-bourgeoisie when they [went] back to China.” Chinese students, for their part, were “usually the sons of wealthy and official families, so they [were] opportunistic and reactionary.”⁴⁰ Communists had trouble selling newspapers; often they gave them out for free. Their dogmatic approach to the problems of Chinatown pushed the Chinese community away.⁴¹ Even their anti-Japanese campaigns were not successful.⁴²

US Chinese communists criticized themselves for being “the tail of the backward masses” in the “anti-imperialist and antiwar movement.”⁴³ They desperately tried to reach out to “capitalist organizations.”⁴⁴ Typical of early CCP organizations overseas, the Chinese fraction in San Francisco, consisting of just seven students, did not have much contact with the “masses.”⁴⁵ They promoted anti-Japanese boycotts and competed with the GMD and other Chinese organizations, such as the “Chinese Freemasons” (*Zhigongdang*) and the “Royalists” (*Baohuanghui*), for the allegiance of their Chinese compatriots. The Chinese fraction was eager to contribute to the Anti-Japanese National Salvation movement and wanted party activities to be publicized in Chinese newspapers.⁴⁶

The chapters of the Chinese transnational communist network shared characteristics in the Philippines, Malaya, Cuba, and the United States. Such study groups, typically made up of students and shop

employees, were often hotbeds of Marxist ideas. Yet, Chinese workers preferred traditional ways of self-organizing over those of the radical red unions characteristic of the Third Period. Much of the Chinese community aspired for wealth, not revolution.⁴⁷

The CAIA also acted as a Chinese association. To draw Chinese into the CAIA, the CPUSA's Chinese fraction invoked the problems the Chinese faced. The CAIA protested discrimination against Chinese in Mexico and the United States, and demanded compensation for the unemployed from both the Chinese consulate and Chinese provincial associations (*huiguan*). Workers and small traders were encouraged to protest anti-Chinese discrimination, since the GMD had failed to do so, in Colombia and Peru, and in US cities such as Washington, DC, and New York City.⁴⁸ The CAIA called upon Chinese overseas who wanted to fight discrimination to join the organization.⁴⁹ Since any association with communists would alienate some members of the Chinese community, *Chinese Avantgard* made much of the CPUSA's avowal that it was not connected with the CAIA.⁵⁰

A major theme in the history of diaspora Chinese communism is the drive to become securely settled in given localities. This "localism" could jibe with the Comintern's policies, which often insisted upon the integration of immigrants into wider party organizations, a pattern found in Malaya, the United States, and Cuba. In the United States, "Americanization" was preached in a CPUSA in which immigrant sections predominated.⁵¹ Much as the CCP had argued in the case of the Nanyang communists in Malaya (where 39 per cent of the population in 1931 was Chinese),⁵² Wang Ming reminded Chinese communists in the United States that they had to pay attention to local conditions in those countries where they had established chapters of the AAAIL,⁵³ as well as to the conditions among Chinese migrants in the United States.⁵⁴

Cuba offers us interesting insights into the peculiarities of émigré Chinese communism. *Chinese Avantgard* advocated Chinese participation in the Cuban revolution and in the Cuban Communist Party. It also referred to the history of Chinese participation in local national independence struggles since the Cuban war of independence, during which Cuban local leader Jose Marti had included the Chinese in what the Comintern would call internationalist solidarity and in his Pan-American vision.⁵⁵ In Havana, the CAIA organized a commemoration of the Manchurian incident of 18 September 1931 – the beginning of the Japanese occupation of Manchuria, which was also commemorated in all overseas communities.⁵⁶ Since the Chinese

communists spoke the language of a Chinese association aspiring to protect the rights of Chinese, as in Malaya, the Cuban Communist Party was popular not only among workers and peasants but also among petty peddlers (*gongren yu xiao shangren/xiaozichanjieji*), students, and doctors. In the Cuban section of the CAIA, there were also teachers and lawyers.⁵⁷

In Cuba, CCP-linked organizations existed, and the Cuban Communist Party had an “important nucleus” among immigrant Chinese.⁵⁸ The situation in Canada was quite different. Chinese immigration had been banned in 1923. Additionally, exclusion laws in Canada prohibited Chinese businesses from hiring white people. There were 600 Chinese in 1931 out of a population of 246,000 in Vancouver. The Canadian communist movement was split along ethnic lines, and during the Depression, Anglo-Saxon workers were more likely to receive unemployment relief than recent Eastern European immigrants. Meanwhile, the “Oriental” labour force on the west coast remained an object of controversy, especially among miners.⁵⁹ As in other immigrant societies, immigrants could be swiftly deported for activities deemed unlawful.

Chinese Avantgard publicized the struggles of the unemployed Chinese in Vancouver and counselled them on how to deal with the GMD. It critiqued the Canadian government for its policy of using relief money to break up the unity of Chinese organizations.⁶⁰ There were frequent appeals on behalf of Chinese farmers and their newly founded society,⁶¹ and denunciations of the overzealous regulation of the sale of fruits and vegetables.⁶² A committee of several hundred unemployed Chinese and a Chinese workers’ union in Vancouver⁶³ contributed to the China Salvation movement and reported that Western comrades had also promoted the defense of Chinese soviets.⁶⁴ In Vancouver, a labour union of shingle (*muwa*) workers established a Chinese section and demanded better pay,⁶⁵ and Chinese advocated increasing the minimum daily wage from \$2.40 to \$3.20.⁶⁶ Little covered in the conventional histories of Canadian struggles in the 1930s, these important developments are illuminated only if we access *Chinese Avantgard*, an important source covering transnational Chinese communist activities throughout the Americas.

LIBERATING THE OPPRESSED

Chinese communists embraced the American empire as it had been defined by the Monroe Doctrine, and, paradoxically, used this as a

way of imagining national liberation struggles against that very empire. Anti-imperialism and organizational structures of the LAI and the Comintern made sense in immigrant societies such as the United States, Malaya, and Cuba, where Chinese revolutionaries translated Comintern internationalism into the movement for Chinese immigrant rights. Chinese communists applied the category of “oppressed” to Chinese immigrants and aspired to a revolutionary alliance with the “oppressed nations” in the Americas. This was especially the case in the de facto American protectorate of Cuba, where, in the atmosphere of anti-Chinese discrimination and Comintern-instigated revolutionary activism, the overthrow of the Machado government in 1933 and the following popular revolt looked like the beginning of a revolution.⁶⁷ In Cuba, laws against foreign labourers adopted in the early 1930s aroused the concerns of Chinese. The newspaper argued that Chinese in Guantanamo could help the struggle of Cuban brothers within the organization of the CAIA and that Cuban workers were already helping Chinese peasants – members of peasant unions – to press for their demands.⁶⁸ On 1 February 1934, the Cuban government introduced immigrant registration law.⁶⁹

There were possibly as many as 60,000 Chinese in interwar Cuba, many of them laundry workers. A growing number of them were unemployed – perhaps as many as 6 per cent in places such as Guantanamo.⁷⁰ The sufferings of the Chinese were publicized in *Chinese Avantgard*. The death in jail of communist Huang Taobai (黃淘白) in 1930 and the death of left GMD member Huang Guangrong (黃光榮) in Havana were both covered in detail.⁷¹ In 1933, legislation forced Cuban enterprises to reserve 50 per cent of their positions for local Cubans.⁷² In this setting, many Chinese sought the security of citizenship, and confronted a government that was not only complicit in the discrimination against them but moving aggressively against the left in general. Some Chinese gravitated to the leftist movement.⁷³ At Guantanamo, out of 150,000 residents, 400 to 500 were Chinese. They spent two or three months every year in the sugar plantations and the rest of the time scrounging for survival. To lure Chinese into the CAIA, Chinese communists called for protests against the immigrant registration law and against the deportation of unemployed Chinese.⁷⁴

Chinese Avantgard propagated the spirit of Comintern internationalism. The newspaper covered an American workers’ rally requesting the full independence of Cuba in New York.⁷⁵ Chinese communists

justified their struggle for rights through the Soviet rhetoric of the right to defend the borders of an oppressed nation with arms, and through Sun Yat-sen's discourse of the oppressed nations. They quoted Soviet commissar for foreign affairs Maxim Litvinov, who had argued that the Soviet Union did not deny the right of an oppressed nation (*beiyapo minzu*) to defend its borders with weapons,⁷⁶ and called for another general strike and a protest against American interference in Cuba.⁷⁷

The All-America Anti-Imperialist League was succeeded by the American League against War and Fascism (1933–39). From around 1935, the CAIA's main cause became the anti-Japanese resistance. It became more active in the growing China Salvation movement. Forming an anti-fascist front took precedence over the discourse of the anti-imperialist movement of the oppressed nations and oppressed masses of imperialist countries.⁷⁸ *Chinese Avantgard* published a statement by the Communist Party of Canada arguing against a growing fascism and promoting the Popular Front.⁷⁹ In response to Song Qingling's call, a Canadian chapter of the Chinese National Armed Defense Society (*Zhongguo minzu wuzhuang ziwei Jianada zongfenghui*) was established,⁸⁰ along with the Society of Friends of China (*Zhongguo renmin zhi youshe*).⁸¹ As in other places around the world, the movement of Vancouver Chinese workers and unemployed merged with the anti-Japanese and anti-imperialist movement in China Salvation organizations. Letters calling for support for the Cuban revolution as well as news about Canadian Chinese labour unions appeared on the same page as calls to send money to Cuban Chinese workers on strike from Canada and New York City and the news about the anti-war conference in Shanghai.⁸² A transnational network of radical correspondence had evolved, broadly consistent with Soviet policies but hardly micro-managed in Moscow.

Within that network, there were many shifting currents and nodes of influence. The term "anti-imperialist" had two meanings for Chinese communists in the United States: anti-Japanese and anti-American.⁸³ The support for the GMD among Chinese leftists faded not only as a result of the Communist/GMD split but also because the GMD seemed incapable of effectively fighting imperialist Japan. Nor did it seem capable of protecting overseas Chinese from Depression-era discrimination, whether in the imperialist United States or in the colonial possessions of European states in Southeast Asia.⁸⁴ As the Chinese were a part of the Cuban masses oppressed by American

imperialism,⁸⁵ the movement for their rights in various areas of Chinese settlement was translated into an anti-imperialist movement. For example, the suppression of Chinese labour unions in the Philippines was referred to as white terror.⁸⁶

Because of the US position in the Pacific, the CPUSA promoted the United States as having an important position for China. In line with the Comintern's promotion of the Chinese Revolution, Browder, according to *Chinese Avantgard*, said that his first motherland was the United States and his second was China.⁸⁷ *Chinese Avantgard* portrayed the CPUSA as the only force able to lead the struggle against the discrimination of Chinese immigrants, as well as to lead Latin American anti-imperialist struggles, the Cuban struggle in particular.⁸⁸ The newspaper treated the CPUSA's open letter as a directive for their work among Chinese – which they called, in the manner of the GMD, “overseas Chinese work” (*Huaqiao gongzuo*), presenting the Chinese as part of the American toiling masses and calling on them to establish labour unions.⁸⁹ *Chinese Avantgard* echoed the Nanjing rhetoric of overseas Chinese unity and reported that in New York City, the CAIA had united with other anti-Japanese organizations around two goals: resistance to Japan and unity of Chinese organizations.⁹⁰

The Chinese communists, bitterly opposed to Chiang Kai-shek, nonetheless invoked the heroic example of his predecessor, Sun Yat-sen.⁹¹ They paid special attention to his call to rally the oppressed classes and nations in the cause of China's revival. The concept of anti-imperialist leagues built on Sun Yat-sen's and the GMD's internationalism channelled the need of the Chinese community to blend in with local populations and protect itself from discrimination. Comintern nationalism matched the different needs of local sites. Sun Yat-sen's idea of an alliance with the oppressed fit into the Comintern's worldwide internationalist support of the Chinese revolution, which would bring about China's revival. They represented the Soviet Union as the only ally of oppressed nations⁹² and remembered Lenin as a promoter of an alliance of such nations and oppressed classes.⁹³ An article entitled “Lenin and Chinese Overseas” explained that Leninist anti-imperialism could help the Chinese solve their two biggest problems: how to defeat Japan and where to get food.⁹⁴ The October Revolution represented a shining path for the “1,250,000,000 oppressed people on five continents” whom Sun Yat-sen had mentioned in his writings.⁹⁵ The Annam Communist Party rationalized allying with the CCP because only a soviet

government in China could guarantee China's independence and the equal treatment of oppressed nations.⁹⁶ The Comintern was presented simultaneously as the defender of exploited Chinese workers, discriminated-against Chinese émigrés, and the national rights of China. The internationalist nationalism of Chinese networks, which had been rooted in Sun Yat-sen's notion of a beneficial Chinese alliance with oppressed nations, thus took on a new layer of Comintern internationalism through the Comintern's promotion of international support for the Chinese Revolution and an alliance with local anti-colonial revolutionaries. And Sun Yat-sen came to be considered a forerunner of communist internationalism.

According to this communist vision, Chinese comrades could help both the revolutions of local residents (*juliudi de minzu geming*) and the revolution in China.⁹⁷ In 1934, in the pages of *Chinese Avantgard*, Comintern agent writing as Han Han (possibly Chen Hanxing) explained that a world revolution and the national liberation of the colonies would benefit China's national interests.⁹⁸ Only through an alliance of the oppressed nations and classes could the Chinese resist Japan and save China.⁹⁹ In this Comintern vision, anti-fascism and the fight against imperialism were equally beneficial for the Chinese throughout the world.¹⁰⁰ Nationalism and internationalism merged again when the World Anti-Imperialist Union called for the defense of China.¹⁰¹

NOTES

- 1 See Bernhard H. Bayerlein, "The 'Cultural International' as Comintern's Intermediate Empire: International Mass and Sympathizing Organizations beyond Parties," in *International Communism and Transnational Solidarity: Radical Networks, Mass Movements and Global Politics, 1919–1939*, edited by Holger Weiss (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 28–88, esp. 52–3.
- 2 Fredrik Petersson, "Anti-Imperialism and Nostalgia: A Re-Assessment of the History and Historiography of the League against Imperialism," in *International Communism and Transnational Solidarity*, edited by Holger Weiss, 191–255, esp. 221.
- 3 Such an approach is still the framework of a recent study, the edited volume by Weiss, *International Communism*.
- 4 See the introduction to the present volume.

- 5 Gregor Benton, *Chinese Migrants and Internationalism* (London: Routledge, 2007); Josephine Fowler, *Japanese and Chinese Immigrant Activists Organizing in American and International Communist Movements, 1919–1933* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2007.)
- 6 Fred H. Harrington, “The Anti-Imperialist Movement in the United States, 1898–1900,” *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 22, no. 2 (1935): 211–30.
- 7 Rebecca E. Karl, *Staging the World: Chinese Nationalism at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 113–14, 169–73.
- 8 Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).
- 9 Gotelind Müller, “Versailles and the Fate of Chinese Internationalism: Reassessing the Anarchist Case,” in *Asia after Versailles: Asian Perspectives on the Paris Peace Conference and the Interwar Order, 1919–33*, edited by Urs Matthias Zachmann (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017), 197–211, esp. 204–5.
- 10 Michele Louro, “India and the League against Imperialism: A Special ‘Blend’ of Nationalism and Internationalism,” in *The Internationalist Moment: South Asia, Worlds, and World Views 1917–39*, edited by Ali Raza, Franziska Roy, and Benjamin Zachariah (New Delhi: SAGE Publications India, 2014), 22–55, esp. 43.
- 11 Sun Zhongshan [Sun Yat-sen], “Sanminzhuyi: Minzuzhuyi,” “Sanminzhuyi: Minquanzhuyi,” in *Sun Zhongshan quanji* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1986), 9:193, 200, 253, 304.
- 12 Philip Kuhn, *Chinese among Others: Emigration in Modern Times* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2008), 229–32, 257–65.
- 13 *Monthly Review of Chinese Affairs (MRCA)*, 1931, in Colonial Office Records, London, 273/572: 21–4.
- 14 Hans Piazza, “Anti-Imperialist League and the Chinese Revolution,” in *The Chinese Revolution in the 1920s: Between Triumph and Disaster*, edited by Mechthild Leutner, Roland Felber, Mikhail L. Titarenko, and Alexander M. Grigoriev (London: Routledge, 2002), 166–76.
- 15 Li Yuzhen, “Fighting for the Leadership of the Chinese Revolution: KMT Delegates’ Three Visits to Moscow,” *Journal of Modern Chinese History* 7, no. 2 (2013): 218–39.
- 16 Hu Hanmin, “Minzu guoji yu disan guoji,” in *Hu Hanmin shiji ziliao huiji*, edited by Cuncui Xueshe (Xianggang: Datong tushu gongsi, 1980), 4:1395–1401, esp. 1400–1.

- 17 Liao Huanxing, “Zhongguo renmin zhengqu ziyou de douzheng: Guomindang zhongyang changwu weiyuanhui daibiao de jiangyan,” in *Zhonggong Hengnan difang shi: Xin minzuzhuyi geming shiqi*, edited by Zhonggong Hengnan xianwei dangshi ziliaozhengji bangongshi (Beijing: Zhonggong dangshi chubanshe, 1995), 142–5.
- 18 Fowler, *Japanese and Chinese*, 125.
- 19 Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv sotsial’no-politicheskoi istorii (RGASPI), f. 515, op. 1, d. 4117, 30; Liao Huarxing, “Zhongguo gongchandang lü Ou zongzhibu, 1953,” in *Zhongguo xiandai geming shi ziliaozongkan: “Yi Da” qianhou; Zhongguo gongchandang diyici daibiao dahui qianhou ziliao xuanyuan 2*, edited by Zhongguo shehui kexueyuan xiandaishi yanjiushi and Zhongguo geming bowuguan dangshi yanjiushi (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1980), 502–10; Him Mark Lai, *Chinese American Transnational Politics* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010), 65.
- 20 Fredrik Petersson, “‘We Are Neither Visionaries Nor Utopian Dreamers’: Willi Münzenberg, the League against Imperialism, and the Comintern, 1925–1933” (PhD diss., Åbo Akademi University (2013)), 70, 175.
- 21 “Guba Huaqiao ying jiaji geming huodong,” *Chinese Avantgard* (CA), 15 November 1933.
- 22 Renqiu Yu, *To Save China, To Save Ourselves: The Chinese Hand Laundry Alliance of New York* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2011), 37.
- 23 Him Mark Lai, *Chinese American Transnational Politics* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010), 73.
- 24 Fowler, *Japanese and Chinese*, 145–7.
- 25 The letter is not signed. Wang Ming’s authorship is established based on the fact that he was the liaison to the CPUSA. Gao Hua. *Hong taiyang shi zengyang sheng qi de: Yan'an zhengfeng yundong de lai long qumai* (Xianggang: Zhongwen daxue chubanshe, 2011), 101.
- 26 RGASPI, 515.1.3181, 19–23.
- 27 RGASPI, 515.1.4117, 31–8ob.
- 28 RGASPI 515.1.3181, 19–23. Likely, it was written sometime after 10 July 1933, as the letter mentions the “Extraordinary National Conference” which was held in New York, 7–10 July 1933. The Communist Party of America (1919–1946), *Party History*, accessed 31 August 2015, <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/eam/cpa/communistparty.html>.
- 29 Zhang Bao, “Er, sanshi niandai zai Meiguo de Zhongguo gongchandang ren,” *Guoji gongyun shi yanjiu ziliaozhi* 4: 150–61; D.S. Jones, “Letter from H.B.M. Consulate-General concerning Malayan Communists,” 30 August 1935, Shanghai Municipal Police files, D6954.

- 30 Anna Belogurova, "The Chinese International of Nationalities: The Chinese Communist Party, the Comintern, and the Foundation of the Malayan National Communist Party (1923–1939)," *The Journal of Global History* 9, no. 3 (2014): 447–70.
- 31 RGASPI, 515.1.2756, 19. This was apparently a link developed by Stanford student and CPUSA adherent Shi Huang, who also visited Cuba, studied in Moscow, and returned to China in 1930 to work as a translator for the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party. See Fowler, *Japanese and Chinese*, 145–6; Hu Xuanzhang, ed., *Ziqiang bu xi hou de zai wu – Qinghua jingshen xun li* (Qinghua daxue chubanshe, 2010), 124–7.
- 32 Moreover, the North American model of immigrant sections was brought to bear on the organization of the Malayan Communist Party through the Pan-Pacific Trade Union secretariat, led at the time by US leader Earl Browder. See Anna Belogurova, "Networks, Parties, and the 'Oppressed Nations': The Comintern and Chinese Communists Overseas, 1926–1933," *Cross-Currents: East Asia in History and Culture Review*, no. 24 (September 2017): 61–82.
- 33 "Dui Nanmei da liechang zhanshi zhi 'tiao ting,'" CA, 1 August 1933; "Dui da Nanmei lieyi zhanshi zhi tiaoting," CA, 15 February 1933; "Nanmei hunzhan zhi zhong baise kongbu," CA, 1 March 1933; "Ge Mi Er guo kongjun jizhan – Quan Nanmei jiang juanru dazhan," CA, 15 February 1933.
- 34 See, for example, "Zhongguo suweita weixin kuoda hongjun liliang jia-qiāng," CA, 15 October 1933; "Jinnian de xuanju, fujin qunzhong fan Guomindanglianhe zhanxian," CA, 5 January 1934.
- 35 "Fankang boxue shufu Nanyang Huaqiao," CA, 15 March 1933.
- 36 "Dai Jitao de zun kong chong fo: Yi DaYaxiya-zhuyi ji tongwen tong-zhong gongcun gongrong de kouhao ba zhongguo bianwei Riben de zhimindi," CA, 1 May 1934.
- 37 By 1940, the Chinese community in the continental United States numbered 77,504. Lai, *Chinese American*, 162n55.
- 38 Madelaine Y. Hsu, introduction to *Chinese American Transnational Politics*, by Him Mark Lai (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010) 2–3.
- 39 RGASPI, 515.1.1451, 53–8; RGASPI, 515.1.1111, 26.
- 40 RGASPI, 515.1.1451, 41–4.
- 41 Yu, *To Save China*, 37–9; "Huaqiao jiudi douzheng limian de xianfeng," CA, 15 April 1934.
- 42 "Hengpo Huaqiao qunzhong douzheng fazhan shang de nanguan," CA, 1 February 1933.

- 43 "Guangda de qunzhong fan diguo zhuyi zhanzheng yundong," *CA*, 1 August 1933.
- 44 "Ba gongkaixing yingyong dao Huaqiao geming gongzuo," *CA*, 1 October 1933.
- 45 RGASPI, 515.1.1451, 53–8; RGASPI, 515.1.1111, 26.
- 46 RGASPI, 515.1.4117, 42–59.
- 47 RGASPI, 495.66.7, 137–69; *Xianfeng Bao* 1934, 2; RGASPI, 515.1.1451, 53–58; RGASPI, 515.1.1111, 26.
- 48 "Lun zai Huaqiao gongzuo zhong zhixing geming luxian," *CA*, 1 April 1934.
- 49 "Zhuitao qintun zhi huikuan," *CA*, 15 June 1933; "Yonghu Guba geming," *CA*, 1 September 1933.
- 50 "Gongchandang fouren yu Zhonghua minzu datongmeng you guanxi," *CA*, 15 January 1936.
- 51 Jacob A. Zumoff, *The Communist International and US Communism, 1919–1929* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2014), 15, chap. 5.
- 52 Anna Belogurova, "The Chinese International," 458.
- 53 RGASPI, 515.1.3181, 19–23.
- 54 RGASPI, 515.1.4117, 31–80b.
- 55 Benton, *Chinese*, 37–47; "Guba Huaqiao ying jiaji geming huodong," *CA*, 15 November 1933. On a more practical note, Cuban Chinese donations to *Chinese Avantgard* exceeded the expected amount in 1933 – even double those from other categories of contributors; 1935 brought equally promising results. "Xian'e shoukuan yundong jieshu shi yi shou dao kuanxiang," *CA*, 1 March 1933; "Wancheng sanbaifen xin dingyue da yundong," *CA*, 1 July 1933; "Guba wancheng Qiaobao yingyue juanzhu xianfeng chaoguo ding'e," *CA*, 7 September 1935.
- 56 "Jinian jiuyiba dahui," *CA*, 30 September 1933.
- 57 "Guba geming chaojia shen tongzhi jieji liehen," *CA*, 1 April 1934.
- 58 Benton, *Chinese Migrants*, 42–5.
- 59 Ivan Avakumovic, *The Communist Party in Canada: A History* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1975), 1, 11–15, 24, 28, 68–9.
- 60 "Jianada shiye gongren douzheng," *CA*, 1 December 1933; "Yungehua shiye Huagong zheng de jiuji," *CA*, 1 December 1933.
- 61 "Zhonghua nongren lianhuhui chengli," *CA*, 24 August 1935.
- 62 "Jianada Huanong yaoqiu quxiaoshucai tongzhi," *CA*, 7 September 1935.
- 63 "Yungehua shiye Huaqiao dahui xiang dangju tichu yaoqiu," *CA*, 16 March 1935.
- 64 "Yungaohua Zhonghua gongren baozhanghui qian dahui," *CA*, 29 June 1935.

- 65 "Jianada muwa gonghui chengli Huaren bu," *CA*, 28 September 1935;
 "Huaren muwa gonghui xuanbu jingxing fangzheng," *CA*, 5 October 1935.
- 66 "Jianada Beishi sheng muban gongren bagong kuozhan," *CA*, 1 April 1934.
- 67 "Yonghu Guba geming," *CA*, 1 Sept 1933.
- 68 "Yundan xiongzhuang ji'ang zhi zong bagong da shiwei," *CA*, 1 September 1933.
- 69 "Guba geming chaojia shen tongzhi jieji liehen," *CA*, 1 April 1934.
- 70 "Guba Yundan qiao zhong shenghuo zhi shikuang," *CA*, 15 August 1933.
- 71 Yuan Yan, "Rongru yu shuli: Huaoqiao Huaren zai Guba (1847–1970)," ["Assimilation and Estrangement: Chinese in Cuba (1847–1970)"] (PhD diss., Nankai University 2012), 106, 211, 231, 307. It is of course suggestive that the latter would be commemorated in the pages of the newspaper, but from the early 1920s, the GMD had published a newspaper, and the political activism of Cuban Chinese echoed the Communist-GMD struggle in China, with all its complexities.
- 72 Yuan, "Assimilation," 217.
- 73 Kathleen López, *Chinese Cubans: A Transnational History* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 196–202.
- 74 "Zhonghua gongsuo jiuzheng yilanhui zhi wu gao fanzuo," *CA*, 15 July 1933; "Sinian de huigu yu qianzhan," *CA*, 5 October 1934. As was also the case in Malaya, these Chinese did not object to being deported back to China. "Guba Yundan Qiao zhong shenghuo zhi shikuang," *CA*, 15 August 1933.
- 75 "Gongnong qunzhong zhengqu Guba wanquan duli," *CA*, 1 June 1933.
- 76 "Sulian yonghu beiyapo minzu; Sulian daibiao tichu jingji bu qinfan heyue," *CA*, 15 February 1933.
- 77 "Yonghu Guba geming," *CA*, 1 September 1933; "Guba gongnong zong bagong ganzou Maxiangduo zhengfu," *CA*, 15 August 1933; "Guba geming xingshi wukan," *CA*, 30 September 1933.
- 78 "Huaqiao fandi datongmeng zongganbu jiuyiba sizhounian xuanyan," *CA*, 10 September 1935.
- 79 "Jianada gongchandang xuanju yundong zhenggang: Yu renmin lianhe zhanxian wei zhongxin," *CA*, 28 September 1935.
- 80 "Zhongguo minzu wuzhuang ziwei Jianada zongfenhui zhengshi chengli," *CA*, 16 March 1935.
- 81 "Jianada chengli Zhongguo renmin zhi youshe," *CA*, 29 February 1936.
- 82 "Shanghai fan diguozhuyi zhanzheng dahui. Kaimu xuanyan," *CA*, 1 December 1933; "Yuanzhu Guba geming," *CA*, 1 December 1933; "Yungehua shiye Huagong zheng de jiuji," *CA*, 1 December 1933.

- 83 For example, “Meizhou Huaqiao fandi datongmeng zhengqiu mengyuan,” *CA*, 23 May 1935.
- 84 “Guomindang chumai Huabei geng jinyibu,” *CA*, 1 March 1933.
- 85 “Guba geming xingshi wukan,” *CA*, 30 September 1933; “Guba tudi geming de mofan,” *CA*, 24 August 1935.
- 86 “Baise kongbu zai Feilübin,” *CA*, 1 June 1935.
- 87 “Yi Zhongguo wei di’er zuguo de Bailaode,” *CA*, 10 October 1936.
- 88 “Zhi you Meigong lingdao yiqie fanpai qiao douzheng,” *CA*, 1 October 1933.
- 89 “Meigong gongkai xin zaiyao”; “Meiguo gongchandang yu zhimindi,” *CA*, 1 October 1933.
- 90 “Niuyue Huaqiao kang Ri taojiang dahui zhuzhang jinxing lianhe zuzhi kang Ri,” *CA*, 6 July 1936.
- 91 Propaganda also quoted Sun Yat-sen’s widow, Song Qinglin. Chen Qiyuan, “Duiyu Sun Song Qingling xuanyan zhiganxiang,” *CA*, 1 July 1933.
- 92 For example, “Meizhou Huaqiao fandi datongmeng zhengqiu mengyuan” *CA*, 23 May 1935.
- 93 Yong Ying, “Meiguo gongchandang yu zhimindi,” *CA*, 1 October 1933.
- 94 “Huaqiao qiesheng wenti he Liening zhuyi,” *CA*, 15 January 1933.
- 95 “She lun: Xin shuangshi,” *CA*, 2 November 1935.
- 96 “Dongyang ‘An’nan’ gongchandang di yi ci quanguo daibiao dahui gei Zhongguo gongchandang zhongyang zhixing weiyuanhui de xin,” *CA*, 6 July 1935.
- 97 Xu Yongying. “Zhongguo Guomindang yu Guba geming,” *CA*, 15 October 1933.
- 98 Han Han, “Lun zai Huaqiao gongzuo zhong zhixing geming luxian,” *CA*, 15 March 1934.
- 99 “Huaqiao lianhe jinian shuangshijie dahui jueyi zuzhi kang Ri jiuguo xiehui,” *CA*, 19 October 1935.
- 100 Xu Yongying, “Niuyue quan Qiao kang Ri dahui de jianyue,” *CA*, 27 July 1935.
- 101 “Guoji fandi zongtongmeng haozhao quan shijie qunzhong hanwei Zhongguo,” *CA*, 6 July 1935.

CONCLUSION

Future Avenues for the Study of the Comintern and the National, Colonial, and Racial Questions

Oleksa Drachewych

Left Transnationalism offers a glimpse into some of the most recent research on the Communist International and its efforts to deal with the nation, race, and colonialism. It is our hope that this serves as a snapshot of the state of the field, showcasing some fresh new approaches while adding to the discussions that have long dominated the historiography. That said, our volume is not exhaustive, and we would be remiss if we did not conclude with observations about possible topics and approaches that still are underrepresented in this area.

One notable topic only incidentally touched upon in the chapters of this collection is the intersection of gender and the Comintern's positions on anti-colonialism or race.¹ There has been some recent scholarship that does provide some insight. For example, on the issue of race and gender, there have been a number of important works that have shown how, for many American communists, these issues overlapped. Perhaps the most notable historical figure here was Claudia Jones, who joined the American Communist Party during the 1930s, inspired, in part, by the promotion of the self-determination of nations in the case of African Americans. Following the dissolution of the Comintern and the end of the Second World War, she was arguably one of the most important contributors to the theoretical underpinnings of a communist response to racial and gender oppression.² Other prominent women communists included Grace Campbell and Williana Burroughs, the first black woman to attend a Comintern Congress. Scholars have begun to put the spotlight on their

contributions to Pan-Africanism and communism in the American context, while also stressing their important roles in the party itself.³

The role of women in colonial contexts remains a topic that also deserves more attention. Whereas virtually every party was urged to link the “women’s question” to party work, which should have inherently included some consideration of anti-imperialism, it is hard to say with certainty whether women led unique efforts in specific contexts. In 1920, the Congress of the Peoples of the East, much as John Riddell notes, had a general comment on women and assigned women the rather vague role of supporting the movement in general. Conversely, as Andrée Lévesque reminds us, women were under-represented in Spain during the Civil War. In colonial contexts, and especially through a comparative and transnational lens, the role of women on questions of colonialism, nationality, and race would add much-needed nuance and depth to the growing literature on these issues generally.⁴

Another issue that this collection was unable to address fully is the role of religion. Many papers reference the concerns that communism had with Pan-Islamism, and some highlight the supportive role that certain religious groups played during the United Front (reflected in Sarekat Islam in Indonesia, as noted by John Riddell and Kankan Xie). There has been some consideration of how the faith of certain workers and communists converged in interesting ways, as Ian McKay stresses was evident in Quebec. But these are just brief indications of a topic worthy of much more investigation. Did religion hamper the ability of communist parties, especially in certain regions in the broadly defined “East,” to build their base? This collection emphasizes the role of ethnicity, race, or anti-colonialism in hindering or helping given parties at different times. Religion must have played a role as well. The Comintern saw religion as a reflection of imperialism and bourgeois thinking. At the Sixth Comintern Congress, the Programme of the Comintern stressed that religiously defined trade unions were linked to the bourgeoisie and bore “a romantic feudal tinge.” They were the “most reactionary units of the class enemy in the camp of the proletariat.”⁵ In relation to the national question, the Comintern was generally suspicious of religious elements in movements like that of Mahatma Gandhi; they supposedly promoted passivity and backwardness.⁶ How did its aggressive secularism affect communist fortunes throughout the world? Did a Middle Eastern communist party have to fight with the Comintern in order to accept the support of

interested Muslims? Did Catholicism or Christianity play a significant role in impeding communists in Latin and South American countries – or, as Manuel Caballero suggests, did such transnational religious traditions attune Latin American radicals to internationalist/universalist positions and make certain Comintern ideas attractive?⁷ To mention another avenue of inquiry, as noted in my contribution to this collection, the Communist Party of Australia demanded the secularization of any governmental support for Aboriginal peoples, calling for an end to religious-based education or infrastructure to ensure the protection of Aboriginal culture. Was this secularizing impulse reflected in anti-colonial or racially focused efforts in other contexts, or was it a unique approach developed and promoted by specific parties?⁸

Finally, work should certainly be carried out with regard to rank-and-file communists and their perceptions of the national, colonial, and racial questions. Although referenced occasionally, the role of trade unions is seldom discussed in this collection; yet the Red International of Labour Unions (RILU) played an important role in connection with these three questions as well. The notable example is the International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers which was formed under RILU's leadership.⁹ Organizing racial minorities and immigrant workers was a prominent consideration in the parties of British Dominions. To what extent did unionization and organization affect and inform everyday workers' responses to nationalism, colonialism, or race? Furthermore, as many contributors to this collection have hinted, some sections of the labour movement still had xenophobic or racist tendencies. How were such forces theorized and combatted by on-the-ground Cominternians?¹⁰

Left Transnationalism offers some conclusions about what can be said about the autonomy of communist parties; the different responses to the national, colonial, and racial questions; the varying approaches of certain nationalities in different contexts; the interplay of transnational ideas and debates with the dynamics of national and local parties; and so on. It suggests that the turn to the transnational helps us to transcend many debates that are in many cases Cold War artefacts. Instead of the soothing simplicities of a dichotomous history, it offers us a vista on a sometimes vertiginously complex world. After 100 years, the cultural, political, and social revolution represented (often very imperfectly) by the Comintern and the Cominternians continues to reverberate. It does so, above all, in those spheres where race, nations, and class are all still the subjects of debate and struggle.

NOTES

- 1 Despite our best efforts, our original workshop had no papers that reflected this focus.
- 2 Denise Lynn, "The Marxist Proposition, Claudia Jones, and Black Nationalism," *Black Perspectives*, 1 November 2017, <http://www.aaihs.org/the-marxist-proposition-claudia-jones-and-black-nationalism/>.
- 3 Minkah Makalani, "An Apparatus for Negro Women: Black Women's Organizing, Communism, and the Institutional Spaces of Radical Pan-African Thought," *Women, Gender, and Families of Color* 4, no. 2 (Fall 2016): 250–73; Erik S. McDuffie, *Sojourning for Freedom: Black Women, American Communism, and the Making of Black Left Feminism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011); Lashawn Harris, "Running with the Reds: African American Women and the Communist Party during the Great Depression," *The Journal of African American History* 94, no. 1 (Winter 2009): 21–43.
- 4 There are some notable parallels between some of the issues discussed in papers in this collection and women's organizations. For example, Joan Sangster notes that the problems of the language groups that manifested themselves in the Communist Party of Canada and the Young Communist League, detailed in Daria Dyakonova's piece, also occurred in the Canadian Women's Labour League. Joan Sangster, "The Communist Party and the Women's Question, 1922–1929," *Labour/Le Travail* 15 (Spring 1985): 25–56. Notably, this could be a difficult subject to tackle because of the overwhelmingly male-dominated Comintern bureaucracy. Furthermore, the women's question in general was tackled inconsistently, and virtually disappeared from Comintern discussions in the 1930s. For an astute evaluation of the field, see Brigitte Studer, "Communisme et féminisme," *Clio: Femmes, Genre, Histoire* 1, no. 41 (2015): 139–52. A forthcoming volume on the early communist women's movement, co-edited by Daria Dyakonova and Mike Taber and tentatively titled *The Communist Women's Movement, 1920–22*, will be a welcome addition to the study of this topic.
- 5 "The Programme of the Communist International – Adopted by the VI. World Congress on 1st September 1928, in Moscow," *International Press Correspondence* 8, no. 92 (31 December 1928), 1764.
- 6 *Ibid.*, 1766.
- 7 Caballero argues that internationalism was a natural fit for many Catholic radicals who were intrigued by communist ideas relevant to Latin America. At the same time, he points out that that same influence may

- have also led to a general conservatism, which in turn led to a “distrust” of communism. Manuel Caballero, *Latin America and the Comintern 1919–1943* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 154.
- 8 Research on the role of religion and the national, colonial, and racial questions remains limited. For example, with regard to Islam, there are few new studies specifically looking at the issue. One notable article is particularly critical, and questions whether the Comintern and the Soviet Union had any interest at all in the Muslim world. See Mohammed Nuri El-Amin, “The Role of International Communism in the Muslim World and in Egypt and the Sudan,” *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 23, no. 1 (May 1996): 29–53. An exemplary piece on this topic, looking at the relationship between Korean communists and Ch’ondogyo – the major religion that also acted as the preferred group for United Front anti-imperial tactics in the Korean context – is Vladimir Tikhonov (Pak Noja), “Korean Nationalism’ Seen through the Comintern Prism, 1920s–30s,” *Region: Regional Studies of Russia, Eastern Europe, and Central Asia* 6, no. 2 (2017): 201–24. There is some significant scholarship on the development of the secular Jewish left and its intersection with the Comintern. Ester Reiter presented on secular Jewish internationalism at our workshop, but was unable to contribute to this collection. Some of her work, along with other recent contributions to this topic, can be found in Matthew B. Hoffman and Henry F. Srebrnik, eds., *A Vanished Ideology: Essays on the Jewish Communist Movement in the English-Speaking World in the Twentieth Century* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2016). Another work using a transnational approach that speaks to the intersection of Jewish secularism, nationalism, and communism and notes the cosmopolitan makeup of the movement is Rami Ginat, *A History of Egyptian Communism: Jews and Their Compatriots in Quest of Revolution* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2011).
- 9 Thanks to the efforts of Holger Weiss, we know much more about this body than ever before. Weiss, *Framing a Radical African Atlantic: African American Agency, West African Intellectuals, and the International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers* (Leiden: Brill, 2014); Weiss, “Between Moscow and the African Atlantic: The Comintern Network of Negro Workers,” *Monde(s)* 2, no. 10 (2016): 89–108.
- 10 Several contributions in this collection highlight this problem.

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Index

- Abella, Irving, 349
Aboriginal peoples. *See* Indigenous peoples
acting. *See* theater
Adi, Hakim, 21, 41n63, 265n15
African Americans, 21, 43n77, 92; as “nations,” 17, 25, 248–9, 252; oppression of, 231, 249–51; right to self-determination, 19, 25, 43n75, 232, 250, 253–5, 407. *See also* black communists
African Blood Brotherhood (ABB), 250–1
African National Congress (ANC), 235, 256, 258
Águila o sol (1937), 162–4
Alexander, Robert, 277
Algerian people, 37n8
All-American Anti-Imperialist League (AAAIL), 390–1, 394, 397
Allan, Ted, 195
Alliance for the Support of the Chinese Workers and Peasants Revolution in America (ASCWPRA), 391
All-Union Communist Party. *See* Bolshevik Party (VKP(b))
American Chinese Anti-Imperialist Alliance (CAIA): anti-Japanese resistance, 397; Cuban section, 394–5; formation and renaming, 391; protests against discrimination, 394, 396; regional imagination, 390, 392; transnationality of, 387–8
American Civil War, 254, 266n25
American Communist Party. *See* Communist Party of the United States of America (CPUSA)
Americanism, 370
American Negro Labour Congress (ANLC), 16, 253
Anderson, Benedict, 20, 32, 304, 313n66
Andes, 270–1, 276, 280, 281
Anglo-American Secretariat, 15, 225, 253, 261; CPA relations, 238; dealings with Canada, 189, 322, 329, 341, 345–6, 348; Negro Congress and, 251–2
Anglo-American war, 330–1
Anglo-Persian Agreement (1919), 83
Anglo-Saxon workers, 346, 349, 395
Anglo-Soviet Trade Agreement (1921), 18, 23, 109–10, 132–5, 140, 144, 148n29
Angus, Ian, 317, 340, 343–4
Annam Communist Party, 398
anti-colonialism: activists and leaders, 4, 87, 99; Asia and Southeast

- Asia, 113, 117–18, 292–4, 301–2; Australia and South Africa, 223, 225–7, 231; capitalism and, 58; India, 125–6, 129; origins, 304; Popular Front period and, 236; racial issues, 11, 407–9; Soviet support, 143, 224; Vietnam, 292–3, 306
 anti-communism, 305, 308, 363
 anti-imperialism: anti-foreign resistance and, 304; Bolshevism and, 33, 74–5, 84–5, 91–2, 127; Chinese, 35, 75, 296–7, 301–2, 389–92, 397–9; Comintern tactics for, 14, 23, 103; hubs or metropoles, 224–5; India, 125–6, 143; Marxist thought and, 3; Nicaragua, 167; Puerto Rico, 168, 170; racial issues and, 251; radical, 78, 85; Soviet state and, 23, 109, 126; united front, 99, 108, 112, 117–20.
See also All-American Anti-Imperialist League (AAAIL); American Chinese Anti-Imperialist Alliance (CAIA); League against Imperialism (LAI)
- Anti-Imperialist League of the Americas (LADLA), 166, 168–9
- anti-Japanese campaigns, 393, 397–8
- anti-Semitism, 37n5, 367
- anti-war movement, 101, 361–2, 372, 392, 397
- Arnot, R. Page, 227
- arrests, 209–11, 214–15
- Ashleigh, Charles, 137
- Así es mi tierra* (1937), 162–3
- Asia, 64, 101, 290; British withdrawal from, 109; democratic movements, 56–7, 62, 100; Fourth Congress on, 112–13, 117; Lenin's comments on, 100; Stalin's comment on, 63. *See also* Baku Congress (1920); East, global; Southeast Asia
- Atatürk, Mustafa Kemal. *See* Kemal, Mustafa
- Atrash Al Maghribi, Mahmoud Al, 85
- Australia: Aboriginal peoples, 233–4, 259–60; anti-colonial politics, 223; immigration, 258–9; imperialism, 228–31, 239–40, 259–60; labour movement, 229. *See also* Communist Party of Australia (CPA); White Australia policy
- Australia Labour Party (ALP), 226, 229
- Austro-Hungary, 10, 77
- autobiographies, 183, 186, 191–4, 197, 201n41, 201n48
- autonomy, 95n28, 98n54, 119, 409; of Canadian communists, 319, 324–5, 331; national, 76–7, 79, 121n30, 293; Quebec, 383n25; of race, 275–6
- Avakumovic, Ivan, 344
- Ávila Camacho, Manuel, 159, 176n26
- Bach, Lazar, 237, 258
- Baku Congress (1920), 56, 96n44, 110–11; challenge to British Empire, 108–9, 131; delegates and speeches, 64, 68, 85–6, 107, 130; global hegemony and, 60; women participants, 108, 408
- Basel Congress and Manifesto (1912), 61–2, 66
- Bashkirs, 78
- Bauer, Otto, 10, 13, 57, 70n14, 71n21, 76
- Bayerlein, Bernhard, 387
- Beaulieu, Michel, 35
- Becker, Marc, 20, 34, 266n32
- Belogurova, Anna, 35
- Benda, Harry, 287, 291, 306
- Berlin, 126, 136–8, 144, 227
- Bernstein, Eduard, 216

- Betancourt, Rómulo, 156
Bethune, Norman, 184, 186, 195
Black Belt Nation thesis, 19, 24–5,
 232
black communists, 16, 19, 102, 247,
 253–4, 407
“Black October,” 41n56
Bloxham, Donald, 80
Bolivian Communist Party, 280
Bolshevik Party (VKP(b)), 5, 28, 69,
 114, 189
Bolsheviks, 34, 50, 104, 170, 194,
 291; agitation in India, 127–8,
 134–5, 137, 139, 141–4; anti-
 imperialist agenda, 73–5, 83–5,
 91–2, 125–6; fatwa on, 82;
 Germany and, 79–80; granting of
 autonomy, 77–9, 86; hegemony
 and, 59; national question and, 76,
 106; prewar articles by, 53, 56,
 62–3; propaganda, 89, 128, 134,
 142; revolutionary social democ-
 racy, 53–4, 58–9; world revolu-
 tionary aims, 14, 18. *See also*
 October Revolution (1917)
Bolshevization, 231, 237, 320, 342–8,
 350
Borg, Helmer, 341–2
Boudengha, Tahar, 106, 117
boundaries, national, 29, 31, 218,
 288
Bourassa, Henri, 373
bourgeoisie, 270, 287, 393, 408;
 Australian, 231; black African,
 231–2, 257; British, 236;
 Canadian, 328–30, 361; commu-
 nist alliance, 29–31, 104, 235, 240;
 democracy, 53, 338, 350; German,
 80; hegemony, 9; Lenin’s com-
 ments, 49–50, 103–5; liberation
 movements, 14–15, 57, 93n7,
 98n54, 104–5, 310n14; racism
 and, 249; South African, 231;
 united front and, 116, 118–19
- Boyter, Arcady, 161–5, 170, 172,
 178nn41–2, 178n45; early films,
 178n39
Bozinovski, Robert, 229, 238
Bradley, Benjamin, 227, 238
Brandenberger, David, 18, 40n49
British Empire, 223, 370, 372; armies,
 85, 109; Australian independence,
 230; Bolshevik challenge, 127–8,
 134–5, 137, 139, 141–4; domina-
 tion/dominions, 30–1, 108–9, 231,
 248; Indian-Soviet conspiracies
 and, 139–43; Labour Party, 235–6;
 protectorates, 81–3; socialist revo-
 lution and, 227–8; Soviet diplo-
 matic relations, 125–7, 132–4, 144
British North America Act, 328, 365
Browder, Earl, 37n5, 373, 376,
 383n26, 398, 402n32; Buck’s con-
 nection, 369–70, 378
Broz, Josip, 76
Bruce, Malcolm, 342
Bryan, Harry, 338–9, 341, 349
Buck, Tim, 350, 359n91, 362, 365–6,
 383n26; Canadian independence
 advocacy, 328–30, 368–9; connec-
 tions with Browder, 369–70, 378;
 CPC leadership, 322, 326, 343–4,
 346–7, 354n24; imprisonment,
 368; nationalist deviation, 371
Buhay, Becky, 186, 343
Bukharin, Nikolai, 59–60, 159, 186,
 330; *The ABC of Communism*, 88
Bunting, Sidney, 231, 233, 251, 253,
 256–8
Buro, Maloe, 131, 135, 137
Burroughs, Williana, 407
- Caballero, Manuel, 20, 409, 410n7
Cacic, Tom, 198n17
Cadre Commission, 191, 201n41
Callaghan, John, 236
Callahan, Kevin J., 65–7
Cambodia, 286, 294, 300

- Campbell, Alan, 224
 Campbell, Grace, 407
 Campbell, Peter, 348
 Campos, Albizu, 169
 camps, 186–7, 198n11
 Canada: Chinese communist activities, 392, 395, 397; constitution, 365–6, 378n25; democracy, 373–4; history of communism in, 184; immigrants, 395; imperialism, 330–1; independence, 328–9, 361, 368–9; Liberal government, 364–5, 378; as a liberal order, 338, 375; Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion, 195–6, 202n59, 371; national question, 360–1, 374–6, 379, 380, 381n2; radicalism, 337; socialism, 338–40, 349; total French/English speakers, 377. *See also* Communist Party of Canada (CPC); French Canadians; Young Communist League (YCL)
- Canadian Tribune*, 364
 Canadianism, 369, 373–6, 384n48
 Canadianization, 320, 331, 346
 Cantinflas, 161–4
 capitalism, 55, 57, 227, 248, 253, 344; Canadian, 345, 364; European, 58; expansion, 100; exploitation, 186, 301; heartlands of, 73–4, 91; Japan and, 206; Marx's theory, 290; nationalism and, 216, 218; overthrowing, 216, 227, 349, 377
 capitalist development, 9, 15, 54, 105–6, 377
 Caribbean, 156–8, 171; communist parties, 20; radical networks, 34, 165
 Caron, Berthe, 194, 202n57
 Caron, Gui, 363, 367, 376
 Carr, E.H., 5, 17–18, 23, 107
 Carr, Sam, 191, 322, 324–5, 330
 Castro, Fidel, 32
 Cawnpore Conspiracy Case, 139, 141–2, 151n63
 chauvinism, 78, 107, 368; racial, 16, 263, 271; social, 50, 52, 55, 229
 Cheka, 132, 148n27
 Chen Duxiu, 90, 116
 Chiang Kai-shek, 75, 91, 118, 311n32, 398
 Chicherin, Georgy, 96n44, 114, 128, 132–3, 137–8
 China, 34, 75, 213, 217; Comintern hubs, 296–7, 307; communist movement, 114–15, 213, 286–7, 290–1, 299–301; geopolitical influence, 289, 309; impact of October Revolution, 89–91, 398; Japanese invasion, 218, 304, 388, 394; Lenin's comments, 100; Marxist ideology in, 87–9, 97n53, 290–1; nationality law, 300, 312n47; New Culture Movement, 90, 291; press, 89; revival, 398; tsarist government in, 83, 96n36. *See also* Chinese Communist Party (CCP); Chinese people; Guomindang (GMD); May Fourth Movement (1919); Xinhai Revolution (1911); Southeast Asia
 China Salvation movement, 395, 397
Chinese Avantgard, 391–2, 394–9, 403n55
 Chinese Communist Party (CCP), 15, 75, 87, 91, 398; activities in Southeast Asia, 300–1; foundation, 112, 291; GMD alliance, 87, 90, 115–18, 124n59, 291, 295–7, 306–7; JCP relationship, 213–14; link to Cuba, 394–5; Nosaka's relationship with, 204, 205, 206, 212–15; US fraction and, 391
 Chinese people: in Cuba, 394–5, 396, 404n71; Indies, 302–3, 311n35, 313n59; intellectuals, 291, 292;

- leftists, 89; Lookjin (Thai-born), 305; in the Nanyang, 393, 394; proletariat, 85, 115, 116, 298; rights of, 392; in Southeast Asia, 286, 288–9, 300, 307–8; stereotypes, 302; US communists, 389–94; workers in Russia, 76–7, 93n10, 102; workers in Vancouver, 395
- Chinese Revolution (1925–27), 15, 32, 77, 97, 105; failure, 6; impact on Southeast Asia, 294–9, 302, 306–7, 392; internationalist support, 398–9
- Chineseness, 34, 309; multifaceted roles of, 287–9, 308; resistance to, 301–2, 304–7
- Chun, Allen, 288
- Chuvash, 78
- cinema, 161–4, 176n29
- citizenship, 300, 312n47, 393, 396
- Clarté*, 186, 192, 201n44
- class: alliances, 338; antagonisms, 51, 53–4; against class tactics, 18, 23, 278, 344, 347, 349; consciousness, 9, 216, 275, 280–1, 326; distinction, 90; exploitation, 273–4, 281; family background and, 191; identity, 184, 275; Marxist conceptions of, 89; oppression, 85, 251, 390; race and, 273–6, 281; struggles, 115, 186, 215, 249, 271, 273, 370; war, 81, 184. *See also* bourgeoisie; proletariat; working class
- Claudin, Fernando, 18, 100, 105
- Codovilla, Victorio, 271–2
- Cohn, Werner, 263
- Cold War, 33, 35, 224, 309, 379, 387, 409
- Colombia, 160
- colonialism, 7–8, 100, 216, 379; European, 310n27, 389; exploitation, 55, 290; French, 293; Japanese, 239; revolutions, 14–15, 62, 144; role of women, 408; settler, 29, 230, 231–2, 239, 241. *See also* anti-colonialism
- colonies, types of, 15–16
- Colorado, Antonio, 169, 181n74, 181n76
- Cominternians, 31, 409
- Communist International (Comintern): anti-imperialist united front and, 118–20; campaignism, 64–7; Colonial Bureau, 227, 234; compared to Second International, 49–50; control and centralization tactics, 22–3, 86, 213, 224–5, 342–3; dissolution, 23, 217, 380, 407; founding, 14, 68, 100, 102–3, 286, 340; internationalism of, 18, 183, 390, 398–9; line changes, 5–6, 23–4, 44n89, 379; national and colonial question, 14–15, 17–18, 102, 227, 408–9; opening of the archives, 21–2, 31, 224; racial question, 16–21, 24–5, 407–9; role of religion, 408–9; useful debates, 5–8. *See also* Executive Committee of the Communist International (ECCI)
- Communist Manifesto, The* (Marx/Engels), 9, 88–9, 185, 206
- Communist Party of Australia (CPA): Aboriginal issues, 233–4, 259–60, 409; anti-imperialism in New Guinea, 239; Australian Labor Party and, 226, 228–9; Australia's imperialist identity and, 230–1; Comintern intervention, 34, 248, 258, 264; CPGB relations, 223, 238, 241; White Australia policy and, 258–9
- Communist Party of Canada (CPC): Canadian independence and, 328–31; Comintern directives, 325,

- 342–8, 379; cooperation with CCF, 350–1; francophone members, 188, 326–7, 331, 360–1; Indigenous peoples and, 262–4; leadership, 343, 344–7, 350, 354n24; membership and language sections, 319–22, 325, 332n3, 342–7; organizing tasks, 186–7; outlawing of, 370, 383n33; Popular Front and, 325, 338, 350, 361, 397; significance of belonging to, 183–4, 197; Third International and, 337–8; trade unions and workers and, 340–3, 345, 348. *See also* French Canadians; Lakehead, the; Workers' Party of Canada (WPC); Young Communist League (YCL)
- Communist Party of Cuba, 394–5
- Communist Party of Ecuador, 277–80
- Communist Party of France (PCF), 87, 326, 370
- Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB), 20, 34, 114; disagreements and close relationships, 241; intervention in Australia and South Africa, 223, 226–7, 234, 237–8; London's influence, 225; Moscow's dominance, 224; role in India, 129–30, 137, 227, 236
- Communist Party of India (CPI): Comintern relations, 135–6, 143; establishment in India, 137–9, 142; formation, 110, 131–2, 148n26, 227; manifesto, 129; move to Moscow, 135
- Communist Party of Indonesia (PKI), 311n29, 392; founding, 293; Indies Chinese community and, 302–3, 311n35, 313n59; role of Comintern China, 297–8, 300; Sarekat Islam alliance, 294–6
- Communist Party of New Zealand (CPNZ), 260–2, 264, 268n61
- Communist Party of Peru, 20, 34, 281
- Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA): activism in neighbouring countries, 234–5; Comintern intervention, 19, 237–8, 248, 255, 264; CPGB relations, 223; labour and racial equality campaigns, 226, 251, 255–6; membership and leadership, 228, 256–7; Native Republic Thesis and, 231–3, 237, 257–8
- Communist Party of Thailand (CPT), 305
- Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), 26, 212. *See also* Bolshevik Party (VKP(b))
- Communist Party of the United States of America (CPUSA), 237, 250–1, 265n18; Browder leadership, 369–70, 398; Chinese fraction, 388, 390–2, 394
- Communist University of the Toilers of the East (KUTV), 84, 103, 135, 188, 254
- community: academic, 165, 167; artistic, 172n1; belonging, 184–5; Chinese, 286–7, 300, 302–3, 308, 393–4, 398, 402n37; imagined, 30, 32, 288, 304; immigrant, 319–20; of interest, 59, 64
- Congress of the Peoples of the East. *See* Baku Congress (1920)
- conspiracy cases, 110, 138–42, 151n63, 227
- Cooperative Commonwealth Federation (CCF), 348, 350–1, 383n29
- Corbin, Jeanne, 186–7, 197, 197n4, 201n40
- Corretjer, Juan Antonio, 155, 172
- Cottle, Drew, 266n32

- Council of Propaganda and Activities of the Peoples of the East, 131
- Cox, Charlie, 348, 357n77
- criticism and self-criticism, 193–4
- Cuba, 105, 389, 394–8, 404n71
- Curzon Ultimatum (1923), 127, 139–42, 144
- Dai Jitao, 83
- Daily Clarion*, 188, 195
- Dange, Shripad Amrit, 136–7
- Datta Gupta, Sobhanlal, 102–3, 114
- Davis, Roy, 195
- “Declaration of the Rights of the Peoples of Russia” (1917), 75
- Delisle, Paul, 190, 192–4, 201n48
- Devi, Shanti, 129, 147n17
- diaspora, 27, 360, 381n2; Chinese, 288–9, 304, 309, 388–9, 392–4
- Dimitrov, Georgy, 44n89, 190, 196, 209–11, 379
- diplomacy, 110, 114; British-Soviet relations, 126–7, 132–4; Comintern and, 17–18, 23, 32
- Dirlik, Arif, 291
- Don Quijote* (Cervantes), 163, 165, 167–8, 180n64
- Drachewych, Oleksa, 34
- Drew, Allison, 236, 237
- Dubé, Évariste, 186, 191–3, 200n34, 371
- Dullin, Sabine, 183
- Duplessis, Maurice, 361, 366, 372, 384n39
- Dutch East Indies, 87, 110–11, 119, 307, 312n47; Chinese community, 302–3; colonial government, 311n29; early communist movement, 287, 295–6
- Dutt, Rajani Palme, 130, 227–8
- Dyakonova, Daria, 34
- Earsman, Bill, 253
- East, global, 60, 131, 296, 307, 408; Comintern’s attention to, 14, 18, 49, 56, 107, 112–13, 294, 299; Congress discussions on, 112–13, 128; as receptive to communism, 68, 85; revolutionary women of, 108; social democratic movements, 56–8
- Ebert, Friedrich, 79–80
- economic logic, 8, 100
- economy: common, 13, 26, 385n55; European, 57; industrial, 79; Italian, 80; Peru, 281; political, 187, 190; socialist, 3, 274; South African, 238
- Ecuador: Indigenous nationalities, 270–1, 276–7, 282; leftists, 280–1
- Ecuadorian Socialist Party (PSE), 279–80
- education, communist, 185–7, 214, 299. *See also* schools; training
- Egypt, 81–2, 95n28
- Eisenstein, Sergei, 162, 164–5, 178n41
- El expectador impertinente* (1932), 162, 178n42
- Eley, Geoff, 349
- elitism, 60, 164, 166, 180n62, 293, 305, 313n66
- El Nacionalista de Ponce*, 169
- Engels, Friedrich, 8, 12, 26, 44n84, 225, 234, 377; *The Communist Manifesto*, 9, 88–9, 185, 206; *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*, 88
- espionage, 5, 210, 215, 362
- Estonian Workers’ Commune (Narva), 81, 94n24
- ethnic groups: in communist movements, 272, 294; Malaya, 304; Muslim, 75, 78, 101; national autonomy, 76; prejudice, 338–9, 343; Vietnamese, 292, 302

- Eurocentrism, 18, 49, 100–1, 105, 119, 379, 388
- exclusion laws, 393, 395–6
- Executive Committee of the Communist International (ECCI), 272, 297, 325; CCP and GMD statements, 116–18, 124n59; conflict over policy, 22; CPA's complaints, 238; CPSA and, 235; Eastern Department, 103, 108, 138; members, 206; Native Republic Thesis, 232, 258; resolution on the Australia question, 230; resolution on the CPNZ, 260–1; Turkestan Buro (Turkburo), 131
- exile, 143, 159, 166, 205, 241, 370
- Extraordinary International Socialist Congress (1912), 61–2
- Fanon, Frantz, 11
- fascism and anti-fascism, 33, 184, 187, 237–8, 361, 399; international solidarity, 186, 196; Japanese, 218, 236; the Lakehead and, 359n88; Popular Front, 235–6, 350, 397; Spanish, 371
- February Revolution (1917), 77
- fellow traveller (*poputchik*): Canadian, 187–8, 199n19, 349; Comintern affiliation, 157; ideological identity and, 170–1; in Latin America, 165, 168; revolutionary statements, 164; term usage, 155–6, 172n1
- Ferneyhough, Beatrice, 187
- Fifth Comintern Congress (1924), 112–13
- Finnish Organization of Canada, 341
- Finns: CPC/YCL membership, 35, 319, 321, 325, 340–8, 350–1, 355n34; voting behaviour, 348, 357n77
- First Comintern Congress (1919), 102, 247, 249; manifesto, 3, 102, 128
- First World War, 49, 73, 75, 81–3, 125, 127, 291; British Empire and, 226; Chinese labourers, 76; conscription, 360, 372; deaths, 79; League of Nations, 268n54
- folk communism, 292
- Ford, James, 16, 32, 253, 265n15
- foreign policy, 126–7, 133, 344, 379
- foreign workers, 263–4, 409; Chinese, 77, 93n10, 102, 394–7, 399; labour movement and, 250, 251, 255, 259, 347
- Fortin, Gérard, 196, 202n69
- Fortin, Willie, 186, 190, 192, 201n44
- Fourth Comintern Congress (1922), 108–9; anti-colonial struggles in Asia, 112–13, 117; “Negro question,” 250–1, 253; policy on Pan-Islamism, 111, 113; Roy's Theses, 3, 15–16; Trotsky's comments, 68–9
- Fraina, Louis, 110, 250
- Frank, David, 349
- French Canadians: anti-war activism, 361–3; Buck's interest in, 368; Comintern directives on, 347, 360–1, 368–9, 379–80, 381n4; CPC recruiting/purging, 35, 319, 326–8, 331, 362, 378; Marxists and, 377; middle class, 366; nationhood or self-determination, 35, 360–1, 365, 375, 385n55; Ryerson's views of, 371–5, 377–8, 385n59; students at Lenin School, 188–90, 193. *See also* Gagnon, Henri
- French Indochina, 287, 299, 307
- Friends of the Soviet Union, 187
- Fuwa Tetsuzo, 212

- Gagnon, Henri, 35, 362–7, 371, 376, 378–80, 382n20
Gallegos, Luis Gerardo, 279–80
Gandhi, Mahatma, 91, 131, 136, 140, 299, 408
García Lorca, Federico, 180n62
Garveyism, 16, 19, 21, 249, 257
Geigel-Polanco, Vicente, 169–70
Gellner, Ernest, 9, 32, 217
gender, 407–8. *See also* women
German Communist Republic, 80
German Social Democratic Party (SPD), 63, 80
Germany, 8, 75, 83–4, 195, 240; revolution (1918), 79–80, 91, 102
Gerwarth, Robert, 79
Godbout, Adélard, 372, 374
Goebel, Michael, 32
Goscha, Christopher, 309
Gramsci, Antonio, 10–11, 20, 30, 38n26, 380
grassroots activism, 323, 364, 378–9
Great Depression, 186, 286, 327, 395, 397
greetings, communist, 166–7, 171, 179n60
Guangzhou, 87, 297–9
Gumede, Josiah, 235
Guomindang (GMD), 312n47, 397, 404n71; activities in Southeast Asia, 299–300; CCP alliance, 87, 115–18, 124n59, 291, 295–7, 306–7; Comintern relations, 105, 389–90; National Revolutionary Army, 74–5, 296, 299, 311n32, 311n35; overseas Chinese and, 389, 394–5, 398; purge of CCP members, 299, 301; Soviet aid, 114, 118; Sun Yat-sen leadership, 90, 111–12
Gupta, Nalini, 137
Hakusan Maru (ship), 214
Hallas, Duncan, 105
Han Han, 399
Hardy, George, 237–8
Hautamäki, Alf, 346
Haywood, Harry, 232, 254, 266n25
Haywood-Nasanov Theses, 254
hegemony, 9, 30, 381n2; anti-socialist, 305; Bolsheviks and, 59, 91; leftist, 340; Muslim, 78; proletariat, 278; scenario of revolutionary social democracy, 59–60
Henderson, Rose, 199n19
Hervé, Gustave, 62
Hill, A.T., 350, 354n24
Hillquit, Morris, 54–5, 70n14
Hinther, Rhonda L., 319
Hirsch, Francine, 44n85
Hispanic studies, 165–6
Hobsbawm, E.J., 32, 274
Ho Chi Minh, 4, 6, 32, 84, 87, 113, 298, 300
Holder, William, 339
Hu Hanmin, 390
Huang Taobai, 396
Huiswood, Otto, 250–1
Humbert-Droz, Jules, 272
Hungary, 80–1
Hunter, Peter, 187, 191–4, 197, 201n44, 202n59
iconoclasm, social and artistic, 161–3, 170
identity: Canadian communist, 34; Chinese, 288, 291; collective, 164, 184; cultural, 106; Estonian, 81, 95n24; ethnic, 271, 282; ideological, 171; of CCP leaders, 34, 204, 219; Mexico's *machismo*, 163; national, 33, 77; politics, 301; racial, 275, 277; Tatars, 78
Ien Ang, 288

- immigration, 253, 258–9, 267n48, 300; cultural preservation, 319–20; integration, 394; unemployment, 395–6. *See also* diaspora; foreign workers
- imperialism: American, 20, 250, 397–8; Australian, 230–1, 239–40, 259; British, 17, 91, 230, 232, 239, 240, 255, 328–9; Canadian, 330–1, 376; Dutch, 293; European, 63, 287; French, 240; Japanese, 239, 397; Kautsky's writings on, 54, 58; revolutionary social democracy and, 54–5; struggle against, 12, 103, 377; Western, 290–1, 295. *See also* anti-imperialism
- India: Anglo-Soviet Trade Agreement and, 127–8, 132–5; Bolshevik propaganda, 128, 132, 134, 142; Comintern intervention, 129, 137–8; communist movement, 34, 110, 114, 130–2, 135–9, 144; conspiracy cases, 139–43, 227; CPGB's role in, 129–30, 227; Marx on, 216; non-violence, 91; partition of Bengal, 87; racial makeup, 250; Soviet challenge to, 125–7, 143–4. *See also* Communist Party of India (CPI)
- Indian National Congress (INC), 110, 131, 136
- “Indian question,” 34, 270–1, 274–5, 280; “Negro question” difference, 252
- Indies Social Democratic Association (ISDA), 293, 295, 297, 310n24
- Indies Social Democratic Union (ISDV), 87
- Indigenous peoples, 106; Australia, 233–4, 239, 248, 259–60, 268n51, 409; Canada, 262–4; Comintern tactics for, 255; Ecuador, 270–1, 276–82; Latin America, 273–5; nationalism, 270–1, 276; New Zealand, 260–2, 268n61; Peru, 272, 276; revolutionary movements, 281–2
- individuality, 22–3
- Indonesia. *See* Communist Party of Indonesia (PKI); Dutch East Indies
- Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), 339–43, 345, 348, 350, 354n24
- intellectuals, 84, 167, 169, 272, 277, 280; Chinese, 112, 289, 291, 389–90; left-wing, 292; Muslim, 78; Quebec, 366; Southeast Asian, 295, 298; Vietnamese, 298, 306; Western-educated, 305, 307
- International Brigades, 195–6
- International Lenin School (ILS), 16, 202n59, 258, 322, 346; communal dormitories, 200n25; women students, 202n57; YCL students, 188–95, 200n27, 322, 329–30
- International Red Aid (MOPR), 184, 197n4
- International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers (ITUCNW), 16, 20–1, 247, 409
- Iran, 109–10
- Italian food riots, 80, 94n22
- Ito Ritsu, 212–15, 219
- James, C.L.R., 25, 33, 36n3
- Japan: army, 111; capitalism/communism transformation, 206–7; censorship, 89; circulation of Marxist texts, 87–8; communist education, 214; Germany's privileges and, 83; invasion of China, 218, 304, 388, 394, 399; Korean mobilization, 82; law and order, 213; socialists/socialism, 217–18; Stalin's war on, 212, 214, 216–17;

- US occupation, 207; Yamaguchi Prefecture, 205–6
- Japanese Communist Party (JCP): CCP relations, 212–15; Comintern and, 208–11, 217; members and former leaders, 158, 205, 218; military agitation, 207; Nosaka’s leadership and betrayal, 34, 206–12, 219; Soviet relations, 216–18
- Jews, 27, 159; CPC/YCL membership, 319, 325; leftists, 367, 378; Montreal communists, 361–2, 367; secularism, 411n8; Toronto YCL, 323–4, 334n36
- Ji Chaoding, 390
- Jolliffe, E.B., 350–1
- Jones, Claudia, 407
- Jones, David Ivon, 234–5, 250, 252
- Jones, Elizabeth Ceiriog, 235
- Julien, Charles-André, 112–13
- Kahlo, Frida, 164, 178n45
- Kalinin, Mikhail, 66
- Kamenev, Lev, 53, 56–7, 62–4, 118
- Kanet, Roger, 19
- Kankan Xie, 34, 408
- Kansan, Arahata, 216–17
- Karakhan Manifesto, 83, 96n36
- Kardash, William, 195–6
- Kashtan, Dave, 185, 187, 198n8, 327
- Kashtan, William, 195
- Kasperova, Varsenika, 108, 122n34
- Katayama Sen, 211, 252, 254, 265n18
- Kautsky, Karl, 10, 24, 70n14; advice to Iranian democrats, 57–8; fight against opportunism, 52–3; Lenin’s critique of, 11, 50, 54–5, 59; *Road to Power*, 52–3, 56, 70n12; “Slavs and Revolution” article, 63; writings on imperialism, 54, 58
- Kawakami Hajime, 206, 213
- Kaye, Cecil, 136–7
- Kemal, Mustafa, 91–2, 109, 114, 122n38, 127
- KGB, 208, 212
- Khánh, Huỳnh Kim, 292–3, 299, 305
- Khrushchev, Nikita, 26, 33
- King, Mackenzie, 365, 372, 375
- Kirasirova, Masha, 224
- Kirschenbaum, Lisa, 31–3, 200n25
- Kita Ikki, 218
- Kocho-Williams, Alastair, 34
- Koivu, Anna, 357n77
- Kolarov, Vasil, 113
- Kommunistische Internationale* (magazine), 112–13
- Korea, 411n8; independence movement, 82–3; workers in Russia, 76, 102
- Kotane, Moses, 238
- Kuhn, Philip, 288
- Kun, Béla, 60, 76
- Kurdistan, 29
- Kyrgyz soviet republic, 79
- La Guma, James, 254–5, 257
- La ligue des vétérans sans-logis*, 364
- La mujer del puerto* (1934), 161–2
- La voix du peuple*, 363, 374
- Labor-Progressive Party (LPP), 350–1, 359n91, 359n94, 369
- labour movement, 205–6, 226, 297–8, 409; Australian, 229, 233, 259; Canadian, 338–40, 347–9; Chinese workers’, 395, 397; foreign workers and, 250–1, 255, 259, 347, 409; role of socialist leaders, 344. *See also* trade unions
- Lakehead, the: anti-fascism and, 359n88; background, 337–8; Bolshevization and, 345, 348; CCF and, 350–1; CPC leadership and, 342, 347; division and prejudice, 338–9; labour and political landscape, 339–41; location, 35,

- 35n2; Workers' Unity League at, 348
 landowners, 80, 94n24, 231, 277–8
 language: French, 326–8, 377; nation and, 13, 27; sections in CPC/YCL, 319–25, 331, 346–7; translations, 87–9, 97n53
 Lassalle, Ferdinand, 64–5
 Latin America, 34, 110, 176n29, 278, 392; Buenos Aires conference (1929), 270–1, 273; Comintern leaders in, 20, 271–2; fellow travellers, 155–6, 168; Marxists, 106; modernity, 156; problem of race in, 273–6; radicals, 409, 410n4; theater, 158–60
 League against Imperialism (LAI), 16, 21, 32, 184, 261, 387; Nehru's participation, 32, 389; US Chinese communists and, 390–1, 396
 League against War and Fascism, 184, 358n81, 397
 League for African Rights (LAR), 257–8
 leftists, 36n4, 80, 159, 184, 373; Canadian, 337–8, 340–1, 343, 348–9, 364; Chinese, 89, 396–7; Ecuadorian, 280–1; GMD organizations, 391; Japanese, 218; Jewish, 367, 378, 411n8; worldwide, 4, 387
 Lekhotla la Bafo, 235
 Lenin, V.I., 75, 81, 95n24, 101, 216, 340; on African Americans, 248, 254, 266n25; anti-imperialism, 74, 103, 398; “Backward Europe, Advanced Asia,” 100, 105–6; compared to Stalin, 12; death, 15, 18, 110; on the European “revolutionary situation,” 54, 70n12; *Imperialism*, 54, 147n19; on India's revolution, 129; Kautsky and, 11, 50, 53–5, 59, 63; on the proletariat, 8–9; Second Congress and, 65, 67, 104; *State and Revolution*, 89, 206; “The Awakening in Asia,” 310n22; “The Right of Nations to Self-Determination,” 6, 11–12, 27, 37n6, 96n35; translation of works, 88–9. *See also* “Theses on the National and Colonial Question” (Lenin)
 Lenin School. *See* International Lenin School (ILS)
 Lessing, Doris, 235
 Lévesque, Andrée, 34, 408
 Li Dazhao, 85
 Liao Huanxing, 390
 Lidtke, Vernon, 64
 Liebknecht, Karl, 67, 80, 218
 Lih, Lars, 33
 Litvinov, Maxim, 134, 397
 Liu Renjing, 117
 Liversedge, Ronald, 195–6
 Löwy, Michael, 8–9
 Luxemburg, Rosa, 10, 67, 75, 80–1, 114, 218
 MacDonald, Jack (John), 189, 330, 345, 354n24
 Macintyre, Stuart, 229, 238, 265n15
 Malaka, Tan, 84, 111, 297–8, 301
 Malaya, 286–7, 294, 392–4; CCP cadres in, 300–1, 303; national liberation, 304
 Malayan Communist Party (MCP), 301, 303–4
 Mandela, Nelson, 4, 8
 Manela, Erez, 3, 81, 128
 Manion, Robert, 337–8
 Manley, John, 338, 340, 342, 347, 350, 353n20, 368
 Mao Zedong, 205–6, 213–14, 219n4

- Maori peoples, 260–2, 264, 268n61
Mariátegui, José Carlos, 20, 30, 106, 279, 282; compared to Paredes, 277; on race in Latin America, 270, 272–6, 281
Maring. *See* Sneevliet, Henk
Marks, John, 231
Marriott, Charlie, 323, 326
Maruyama Masao, 217–18
Marx, Karl, 127, 196, 215, 383n26; *The Communist Manifesto*, 9, 88–9, 185, 206; translation of works, 86, 88–9
Marxists/Marxism: Austro-Marxists, 10, 13, 76; capitalism, 290; in China and Japan, 87–9, 290–1; dialectics, 162, 164–5, 167, 170; French Canada and, 377; historical materialism, 215; in the Indies, 295, 303; Kautsky and, 50, 55; Leninism, 9, 299, 302, 307, 342; nation and nationalism and, 3, 6–10, 32, 39n31, 44n84, 379–80; opportunism and, 52; Peruvian and Ecuadorian, 275, 277, 281–2; race and, 17, 25, 27, 149, 249, 273, 275; revolutionary principles and, 53–4, 70n12; Second International and, 50–1, 100; in Thailand, 305
May Fourth Movement (1919), 83, 88, 90, 95n28, 291
McEwen, Tom, 349
McIlroy, John, 224
McKay, Claude, 25, 33, 102, 157, 174n10, 250–1
McKay, Ian, 35, 338, 344, 349, 408
McVey, Ruth, 293, 296–7, 300, 309n7
Meizhou Huaqiao fandi datongmeng. *See* American Chinese Anti-Imperialist Alliance (CAIA)
Melanesian peoples, 260
mestizos, 273–4, 275
Mexican Communist Party (PCM), 128–9
Mexico: Chinese community in, 391, 394; cinema, 161–5, 176n29; communists, 164, 171; neutrality, 159, 175n24; theater, 158–60, 177n35, 177n37
military conscription, 360–2, 364, 372–4
modernity, 78, 90; context of *Don Quijote*, 167–8; Latin American and Caribbean, 156, 165, 171; Mexico's transition to, 161; Russian thought and, 171–2; Western, 291
Mongolia, 111
Montagu, Edwin, 135, 140
Montreal: francophone communists, 361–5, 378–9; homelessness, 364; nationalism and anti-Semitism, 366–7
Moore, Herbert, 268n51
Moreno, Mario (Cantinflas), 161–4, 177n38
Morris, Leslie, 189, 191, 194, 330
Morrison, Jean, 339
Moscow, 74, 126, 247; centre for international communism, 224–5, 241, 388; Congress of the East (1922), 115; conspiracies linked to, 140–2; control and demands, 6, 22–4, 99, 119, 137, 223, 297–8, 317, 342; CPA complaints with, 238; CPC and, 342, 344–7, 368; CPGB and, 226–7, 238, 241; CPI's move to, 135–8; JCP leadership and, 207, 211; line, 5–7, 24, 207; rules, 21, 33
Motoyuki Takada, 217
Moxon, Herbert, 233, 259

- Mukherji, Abani, 128–9, 138
- Munck, Ronaldo, 7, 13, 37n8
- Muñoz-Marín, Luis, 169–70
- Murphy, John, 250
- Muslims, 101, 103, 127, 293, 409, 411n8; Bolshevik policy toward, 75, 77–8, 86; Red Army members, 84
- Mussolini, Benito, 80, 359n88
- Nairn, Tom, 380
- Narbutabekov, Tashpolad, 107, 121n30
- Narkomindel, 127–8, 133–4, 137, 144, 146n10
- Nasanov, Nikolai, 254
- nationalism: bourgeois, 14, 30, 370–1, 377–8; Canadian/French-Canadian, 185, 361, 368–9, 373–5, 379, 381n2; Chinese, 288, 301, 312n47; communism/communists and, 6, 30, 215–18, 292, 371; diaspora, 27; Indigenous, 270–1, 276–7, 280–2; internationalism and, 388–9, 398–9; Marxist, 6–10, 13, 39n31, 366, 380; patriotism and, 293, 308; Puerto Rican, 168–70; Russian Empire, 74, 77, 91; socialists/socialism and, 37n6, 217–18; South African, 256; vernacular, 313n66; Vietnamese, 299
- nationalist movements: Asia, 56–7, 63, 307; bourgeoisie, 14, 105, 292, 310n14; Canada, 329–30; Chinese immigrant societies, 395–8; civil war, 77; resistance to Chineseness in, 287, 301–2, 304–6; revolutionary, 15, 104–5, 110; Samoa, 261–2; unity and, 117
- Nationalist Party of China. *See* Guomindang (GMD)
- nation(s): African Americans as, 17, 25, 248–9, 252; backward, 56, 100, 105–6, 121n23; of Canada, 329, 369, 373–6, 381n2, 385n55; Comintern debates on, 7–8; Gramsci's theory, 10–11; Lenin's theory, 11–12, 106, 248; Mariátegui's theory, 20; Marxist tradition and, 3, 8–10, 32, 39n31, 44n84, 100, 380; nationality distinction, 44n84; oppressor and oppressed, 9, 11–12, 27, 29, 396–9; Stalin's criteria for, 12–14, 17, 26–7, 254, 385n55
- nation-state, 9, 25, 31, 33, 275, 309; Chinese term for, 89, 97n53; conflated with nation, 29, 369, 373; identity-making and, 302, 304; territory and, 76, 79
- Native Republic Thesis: Australian context, 233, 254, 259; Comintern support for, 248, 258, 264, 275; “Indian question” and, 34; South African context, 19, 24, 231–3, 237, 255–8
- Nazis, 76, 175n24, 236, 258, 262
- Nazi-Soviet Pact (1939), 23, 32–3, 240, 361, 372
- Negro Commission, 20, 253–4, 257, 263
- “Negro question,” 265n18, 273; “Chinese/Indian question” differences, 252–3; Comintern’s tactics on, 16, 19–21, 247–8, 253, 263; discussion at Fourth Congress, 250–1; policy of self-determination, 253–5; term usage, 39n41
- Nehru, Jawaharlal, 4, 32, 389
- Nelson, Olaf Frederick, 261
- New Guinea, 230–1, 234, 239, 259–60, 268n54
- “new Soviet man,” 185, 191, 196
- New Zealand, 248, 260–2, 263–4, 268n61
- Nguyen Ai Quoc. *See* Ho Chi Minh

- Nosaka Sanzo: betrayal of Yamamoto, 208–12, 218; birthplace and early political life, 205–6; JCP leadership, 34, 206–8, 216; Mao Zedong and, 219n4; public celebrations for, 204–5; reaction to Comintern dissolution, 217; report to CCP on Ito, 212–15, 219
- October Revolution (1917), 10, 17, 33, 86, 223, 337; impact of, 101–2; influence in China, 89–91, 290–1, 398; international character, 76–7; prisoners of war, 76, 93n7; self-determination and anti-imperialist ideology, 73–5, 91, 127
- One Big Union (OBU), 339–41
- Onís, Federico de, 165, 180n62
- opportunism/opportunists, 51–4, 59, 67, 90
- oppression: of Chinese immigrants, 389, 396; class, 85, 270, 390; colonial, 102, 239; of French Canada, 371, 377, 379; gender, 407; of Indigenous peoples, 259, 266n32, 274, 278, 281; of nations, 8–9, 11–12, 27, 29, 74–5, 99, 100, 397–9; racial, 32–3, 92, 231, 249–51, 253–5, 257, 280; “shackles of,” 185
- Oshima Hiroshi, 218
- Ottoman Empire, 78, 81, 94n14, 95n28
- Padmore, George, 16, 25, 32–3, 84, 253
- Páez Cordero, Alexei, 277
- Palestinian communists, 85
- Pan-Africanism, 16, 21, 84, 113, 408
- Pan-Islamism, 78, 86, 91, 111, 113, 293, 408. *See also* Sarekat Islam (SIS)
- Pantsov, Alexander, 115–16, 124n59
- Papineau, Louis-Joseph, 195, 371, 374
- Paredes, Ricardo, 270, 277–82
- Partido Popular Democrático (PPD)*, 169–70
- Pasha, Enver, 122n38, 127
- patriotism, 304, 385n55; anti-imperialist, 302; Vietnamese, 293, 305–6, 308
- peasantry, 81, 98n54, 104–6, 277; African, 231–2; Chinese, 396; Indian, 281; Italian, 80; movements, 279, 292; organizations, 235; proletariat and, 58–60, 275, 278
- Penner, Norman, 329, 382n25
- Pennetier, Claude, 189
- Pennybacker, Susan, 32
- People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs. *See* Narkomindel
- Pepper, John, 229
- Pérez, Josie, 177n35
- Persia, 83
- Peru, 17, 20, 270, 392; Indigenous peoples, 29, 272–3, 275–6; revolutionary movement, 281–2
- Peruvian Socialist Party, 279
- Pesce, Hugo, 273
- Peshway Conspiracy Case, 140–1
- Petersson, Fredrik, 21, 387
- petit-bourgeois, 28–30, 58, 377–9; social democracy and, 53, 58. *See also* bourgeoisie
- Petrovsky, Max, 254, 257
- Philippines, 299, 391, 393, 398
- Pipes, Richard, 17
- Piscator, Erwin, 159–61, 177n36
- political capital, 190
- political culture, 67, 196
- Pons, Silvio, 18
- Popular Front, 6, 258, 338, 361; adoption of, 23, 44n89; anti-fascist, 235–6, 350, 397; policy, 240, 325

- poputchik.* See fellow traveller (*poputchik*)
- Potresov, Aleksandr, 51
- Poulantzas, Nicos, 8
- prejudice. *See* racism
- press, 89, 321
- proletariat: bourgeoisie and, 270, 290; Brazil's, 9; campaigns, 65; Chinese, 85, 115–16, 298; class-conscious, 9, 216; dictatorship, 3, 190; European, 58, 61, 64; Indian, 275–6; Marx's, 8–9; peasantry link, 59–60, 231, 275, 278, 287; revolutionary, 103–4, 190; socialist, 57, 59, 61–2, 227, 338; struggle against imperialism, 12, 61; theater groups, 158–9, 161, 174n17, 177n36; Trotsky's comments on, 68–9; unity, 250; urban, 292. *See also* working class
- propaganda: Bolshevik/anti-Bolshevik, 89, 128, 134, 142; in Britain, 130, 133; Chinese communist, 115; French language, 326–8; Indian communist, 131, 136, 138; Nanjing-era, 392–3; Soviet, 23, 135, 387; Vietnamese communist, 299
- proto-nationalist movements, 292–3
- pseudonyms, use of, 191, 201n40
- public space, 67
- Pudal, Bernard, 189
- Puerto Rico, 166–7, 168–70, 177n35
- Pujals, Sandra, 34
- Qu Qiubai, 83
- Quebec: anti-war movements, 361–2, 372; economic backwardness, 371, 376; *nationalistes*, 362–3, 365–7, 373–4, 376, 379; province motto, 372, 384n39; sovereignty, 365; women, 194; working class, 326–7, 361. *See also* French Canadians
- Quiñones, Samuel R., 169–70
- race: Canada and, 374; Comintern's treatment of, 18–21, 34, 248, 407–9; compared to nation, 248; in Latin America, 20, 271–2; Maori and Samoan issues, 261–2; Mariátegui on class and, 273–6, 281; nationalism and, 270–1; “Negro question” on, 19, 252–5; references at early Comintern Congresses, 16, 247, 249–53, 263–4; South Africa issues, 255–8; theses, 24–5. *See also* “Indian question”
- racial equality: among black/white workers, 19, 232–3, 237, 253, 256–8; Comintern's platform on, 14, 33–4, 247–8, 263; of Indigenous peoples, 259–60, 263, 274; Lenin's emphasis on, 16, 247, 280; self-determination and, 14, 17, 20
- racism, 229, 236–7, 240; anti-Chinese discrimination, 393–4, 396–7, 399; colonialism and, 227, 250; Comintern rejection of, 251; immigrant workers and, 253, 263, 409; Indigenous groups and, 274–5, 281; Marxist position on, 249; Southern US, 32
- Radek, Karl, 64, 86, 101, 105, 113, 130; position on the GMD, 116–17, 124n59
- radical networks: Caribbean and Latin America, 34, 165, 168–9; Comintern, 32, 155–8, 161, 170–1
- Rand Revolt (1922), 228, 256
- rank-and-filers, 7, 30, 187, 346–7, 365, 409; ideological consciousness of, 186, 320, 323; socialist, 344
- Raskol'nikov, Fedor, 137

- Rasporich, Anthony, 348, 351
Red Army: Chinese workers in, 77; eastern international, 85; in Iran, 109; Muslim, 84; occupation of Georgia, 28; in Poland, 107; women in, 122n32, 122n34
Redfern, Neil, 236
Red International of Labor Unions (RILU), 5, 16, 184, 247, 409
Reed, John, 110, 249
Reichmuth, Stefan, 94n14
Reiter, Ester, 41n8
religion, 82, 287, 309, 408–9, 410n7, 41n8
Renner, Karl, 10, 76
revolutionary social democracy: global East and, 56–8; hegemony and, 58–60; imperialism and, 54–5; Marxism and, 50–1; opportunism and, 52–3; Russian privilege and, 63–4; Second/Third International contrasts, 49–50, 67–9
Rida, Rashid, 82
Riddell, John, 27, 34, 66, 408
Río, Ángel del, 165–8, 170–2, 180n60, 180n62, 180n64
Roback, Lea, 187, 197
Roger, Étienne. *See* Ryerson, Stanley
Rose, Fred, 192, 198n12, 378, 385n55; Montreal by-election, 359n94, 362; YCL organizer, 320, 327
Ross, Hector, 228–9, 260
Roth, Jacob, 323–4, 334n36
Roux, Edward, 226, 231, 235
Roy, M.N., 30, 84, 87, 100, 110, 126, 230; conspiracy case, 138–42, 151n63; expulsion from the Comintern, 114; as Mexican Communist Party representative, 128–9; role in Indian communist movement, 130–2, 135–9, 143; “Theses on the Eastern Question,” 3, 15, 104, 112–13, 129, 132
Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), 317, 321, 326, 342, 349
rural activism, 277–9, 281–2
Russell, R.B., 353n20
Russian Communist Party. *See* Bolshevik Party (VKP(b))
Russian Empire, 27, 125, 144, 148n29, 213; nationalism, 74, 77, 91
Russian Revolution, 11, 41n56, 106, 126; of 1905, 61, 63–4, 81; global context, 170, 172. *See also* October Revolution (1917)
Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR), 79, 86. *See also* Soviet Russia
Russification, 29, 106
Rutgers, S.J., 103, 247, 249
Ryan, Oscar, 325, 369
Ryerson, Stanley, 187, 192, 362, 365, 385n55; Bethune and, 184, 186, 195; Browderism, 373, 376; on French Canada, 371–5, 377–8, 385n59; letter from King, 375; on the nations of Canada, 376, 384n47; pseudonyms, 201n40, 371; UQAM professor, 384n40, 385n57
Ryskulov, Turar, 107, 121n30
Safarov, G.I., 115, 117, 137, 139
Sager, James, 166–70, 179n60, 181n74
Saklatvala, Shapurji, 130, 227
Samoan peoples, 260–2, 264, 268n61
Samuel, Emery, 194, 198n12
Sandino, Augusto, 7, 167
Sangster, Joan, 410n4
Sano, Seki, 158–61, 170–2, 175n23, 177nn35–7
Sano Manabu, 158, 218

- Sarekat Islam (s1), 87, 111, 294–6, 408
- Sawtell, Michael, 234
- schools: drama, 158–60; for Hispanic studies, 165–6; Ontario communist, 365; set up by the Comintern, 188. *See also* Communist University of the Toilers of the East (KUTV); International Lenin School (ILS)
- Scott, Jack, 186–7
- secession rights, 28, 37n8, 101, 376
- Second Comintern Congress (1920), 90, 100, 109–10, 116; CPGB and, 129–30; delegates and speeches, 66–7, 85, 104; Lenin and Roy's theses, 15, 98n54, 104, 117, 129, 252; policy on Pan-Islamism, 111; references to race, 16, 249; socialist revolution in India, 128–9
- Second International (1889–1916), 10, 14, 24, 99, 171, 339; agitation techniques, 64; compared to Third International, 49–50, 64–7; Marxism and, 50–1, 100; opportunism of, 52–3; self-image, 61
- Secret Intelligence Service (sis), 134
- self-determination: of African Americans, 19, 25, 43n75, 232, 250, 254–5, 407; Bolsheviks and, 34, 74–5, 79, 91; contradictions of, 28–9; French Canada's, 190, 329, 360–1, 365, 369; Lenin's emphasis on, 4, 6, 11–12, 27, 37n5, 83, 96n35, 374, 376–7; of Maori and Samoan peoples, 261–2, 268n61; Marx on, 215–16, 380; national freedom and, 101–2; New Guinea's, 239; political, 276; race and, 14, 17, 20, 248, 253–5, 257; Trotsky's support for, 10; Wilson's promise, 4, 74, 81
- Seventh Comintern Congress (1935), 44n89, 235, 257, 350
- Shabanova-Karayev, Khaver, 108, 122n32
- Sherwood, Marika, 236
- Shi Huang, 390, 402n31
- Shimbun Akahata*, 210, 212
- Shukan Bunshun*, 204, 209–10, 212
- Siam, 286–7, 294, 300, 302, 304, 307–8
- Siamese Overseas Chinese Communist Party, 300
- Sixth Comintern Congress (1928), 262, 322, 330, 345–6, 408; Latin America and race discussion, 271–2; Lenin and Roy's theses, 15–16; Negro Commission, 16, 254, 257; rural activism, 277–9; self-determination discussion, 254–5
- slavery, 43n77, 101–2, 108, 248, 373
- Smith, Evan, 20, 34
- Smith, S.A., 22, 33
- Smith, Stewart, 187–91, 193–4, 320, 329–31, 344
- Sneevliet, Henk: anti-colonial activism, 87, 111; as founder of ISDA, 295, 297; work with CCP, 90, 114–16, 118
- social democracy. *See* revolutionary social democracy
- Social Democratic Party of Canada (SDPC), 339, 354n24
- socialism, 9, 54, 57, 91, 93n7, 119, 274; Canadian, 338–40, 349; in China, 114, 117, 291; Comintern and, 23, 226; CPGB and, 241; European, 340; immigrant workers and, 343; Indigenous peoples and, 278–9, 281; international, 73, 104, 226; in Japan, 217–18; labour movement and, 344; Marxist theories, 290; nationalism and, 37n6;

- revolutionary, 4, 191, 226; of the Second International, 51, 61
- Socialist Party of America, 89
- Socialist Party of Canada (SPC), 338–9, 341, 354n24
- solidarity, 12, 188, 278; class, 275, 320; international, 62, 67, 186, 195–6, 224, 394; racial, 250, 252
- Song Qingling, 397
- South Africa, 16, 17, 236, 271; bourgeoisie, 231; Native Republic Thesis, 24, 232–3; race and labour issues, 19–20, 248, 250, 254–8; semi-colonial identity, 228, 231.
- See also* Communist Party of South Africa (CP SA)
- South Africa Labour Party, 226, 256
- South African Communist Party (SACP), 241. *See also* Communist Party of South Africa (CP SA)
- Southeast Asia: Chinese communist model in, 294–9, 302, 306–7, 392; geopolitical influences, 288–9, 309; GMD and CCP activities, 299–301; origins of communist movements, 286–7, 292–4; resistance to Chineseness in, 294, 308
- South Seas Communist Party, 300
- Soviet Russia, 59, 83, 89, 91, 102, 340; allies, 111; backwardness, 79, 90; Chinese workers, 76–7, 93n10; hegemony, 60; popular militancy, 73; treaties, 92, 109, 122n37. *See also* Anglo-Soviet Trade Agreement (1921)
- Soviet Union, 16, 33–5, 225–6, 379, 388, 392; Caribbean and, 157–8; Chinese Eastern Railway and, 83, 96n36; collapse, 17, 208; constitution, 28; contradictions in governing, 28–9; diplomatic relations, 18, 23; GMD alliance, 118; Japan neutrality treaty, 207, 214; JCP relations, 216–18; Nazi invasion, 240, 258; Nosaka's dealings with, 209–10, 212, 216; policy toward Islam, 91; rights of oppressed nations and, 397–9; totalitarian model of, 24; travellers to, 158–9, 165, 185, 187–8, 194, 199n19; Union Republics, 28, 44n85
- Spanish Civil War, 32, 185, 199n17, 202n59, 236, 408; international participation, 194–6
- Spanish Communist Party, 165–6
- Spector, Maurice, 328–30, 334n36, 345, 354n24
- stages theory, 29–30, 105–6
- Stalin, Joseph, 29–30, 63, 78, 86, 118; Canada's subordination to, 344, 346; Comintern and, 5, 24, 36n3, 331, 347, 349; definition of nation, 12–14, 17, 26–7, 254, 375, 385n55; editing of the *Short Course*, 18, 40n49; *Marxism and the National Question*, 12, 25–6, 76; purges, 4, 106, 108, 121n30, 122nn34–5, 211; rise to dominance, 5, 18; rivalry with Trotsky, 211, 216, 295; Trotsky's assessment of, 26–7; war on Japan, 212, 216–17
- Stalinization, 345–6, 368–9
- Stevens, Margaret, 20, 44n94, 227
- strikes, 79–80, 189, 397; Canadian labour, 338–9, 343, 348
- Studer, Brigitte, 31–2, 183, 193
- Sultangaliev, Mirsaid, 78, 84, 86, 93n10
- Sun Yat-sen, 83, 93n10, 115, 389–90; death, 118; discourse of oppressed nations, 397–9; GMD leadership, 90, 111–12, 114, 118, 296; "Three Principles of the People," 295

- syndicalism, 339, 350
- Tagirova, Tatiana, 174n10
- Tashkent, 131, 135–8
- Tatars, 78
- Taylor, Kerry, 262
- Tehran agreement (1943), 369–70, 375, 378
- territory, 13, 27, 43n77, 78–9, 101; Australian, 239, 259, 268n54; shatter zones, 80
- Thailand, 305, 308, 310n27
- Thanh Nien*, 298–9, 306
- theater, 158–61, 177nn35–7
- “Theses on the Eastern Question” (Roy), 3, 15–16, 129, 132
- “Theses on the National and Colonial Question” (Lenin), 14–16, 24, 129; Maori and Samoan peoples and, 261; references to race, 247, 249, 252, 254, 263; two-stage revolution of, 98n54
- Third Comintern Congress (1921), 17, 23, 110, 132, 135–7, 340; race issues, 250; resolutions on the East, 112–13; speeches, 122n41
- Third International (1919–1943). *See* Communist International (Comintern)
- Thorez, Maurice, 37n8
- Thorpe, Andrew, 224
- Tokuda Kyuichi, 205, 212, 214–15
- Tokyo Military Tribunal, 208
- trade unions, 80, 124n59, 226, 409; bourgeoisie and, 408; Canadian, 326, 338–40, 343, 345–6, 348–9; Chinese, 395, 397–8; integration of foreign workers, 251, 253, 259, 263; YCL United Front drive, 323–4.
- training, 84, 91, 131, 137–8, 205, 213–14
- transcontinental migration, 86–7, 195
- transmission-belt model, 5–7, 389
- transnationalism/transnationality: British India context, 125–7, 142–5; of CAIA, 387–8; circulation of texts and, 86–9; of communism, 183; individual experience of, 183–5, 195–6; religion and, 408–9, 411n8
- travellers. *See* fellow traveller (*poputchik*)
- Trotsky, Leon, 10, 43n75, 59, 67, 101, 122n41; biography of Stalin, 26–7; at Fourth Congress, 68–9; letter to Chicherin, 96n44; *Literatura i revoliutsia*, 172n1; Manifesto of the Communist International, 3, 102; publication of secret treaties, 75; on race, 247, 249; rivalry with Stalin, 211, 216, 295
- Trotskyists, 171, 193, 196, 330, 334n36, 383n29
- Turkey, 107, 109–10, 114, 121n30, 122n38; communists, 92, 93n7
- Tu Wei-ming, 289
- Ukraine, 5, 28, 77, 81, 101, 185
- Ukrainian Labour Farmer Temple Association (ULFTA), 321, 341
- Ukrainians, 340; Bolshevization and, 342–4; CPC/YCL membership, 263, 319–22, 355n34
- unemployment, 186–7, 216, 371; Chinese, 394–7; demonstrations, 193, 328
- Union of Chinese Workers, 77
- Union of Korean Socialists, 77
- united front, 226, 228, 251, 256, 304, 340; anti-imperialist, 34, 99, 112, 117–20; bourgeoisie victory and, 116; experience in Indonesia, 119,

- 296; GMD-CCP, 296–7; policy shift, 23, 118; of women workers, 108, 122n32, 122n34; YCL's initiative, 323–4
- United States, 176n26; Canada relations, 330, 369, 379; Chinese communists in, 390–4; citizenship, 393; colonies, 110; Cuba and, 389, 396–7; occupation of Japan, 207; occupation of Nicaragua, 167, 169; oppression, 249–50; Republic of New Africa movement, 43n77; South, 19, 25, 32, 231–2. *See also* Communist Party of the United States of America (CPUSA)
- Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), 249–50
- Usmani, Shaukat, 137, 139, 151n63
- USSR. *See* Soviet Union
- Validov, Akhmetzaki, 86
- Van Kol, Hendrick, 100
- Vancouver, 395, 397
- Vanguard*, 136–7
- Vatlin, Alexander, 22
- Versailles peace settlement, 74, 79, 81, 83, 87, 91, 109
- Vietnam, 87, 289; ethnic groups, 292, 294; patriotism and communist movement, 293, 298–9, 305–6, 308
- Voitinsky, Grigory, 118, 296, 299
- volunteers, 195–6, 199n17
- Wafd (Delegation) party, 82
- Walling, William, 70n14
- Walt, Lucien van der, 235
- Wang Ming, 391–2, 394, 401n25
- Watts, Eugenia (Jim), 187–8, 195
- Weir, John, 191, 322, 330
- Weiss, Holger, 21
- White Australia policy, 226, 228–9, 248, 258–9, 264, 267n48
- White, David (Weiss), 185–7, 197, 198n7
- White, Stephen, 17–18
- Wilson, Woodrow, 3–4, 14, 74, 81–2, 92, 128
- Wobblies. *See* Industrial Workers of the World (IWW)
- Wolikow, Serge, 21
- Wolton, Douglas, 233, 235, 237, 258
- women, 108, 187, 194, 199n20, 408, 410n4
- Worker, The*, 327–9, 359n88
- workers' movement. *See* labour movement
- Workers' Party of Canada (WPC), 332n3, 340–2
- Workers' Unity League (WUL), 187, 347–9
- Workers' Weekly*, 231, 234, 259, 262
- working class: Australian, 229; black, 19–20, 41n63, 247; British, 228; Canadian, 189–90, 326–7, 330, 345, 361–2; Chinese, 115–16, 292, 393–4; European, 55, 290; militancy, 73, 317; national question and, 76; oppression, 9–10, 27, 251, 274, 280; peasantry and, 59, 98n54; South African, 232, 237–8, 255–7; syndicalism, 339; Trotsky's comments on, 68; unity, 9, 12, 249, 252–3, 256, 350, 369; universal, 191; unskilled, 186; youth, 323, 327. *See also* proletariat
- World Anti-Imperialist Union, 399
- Wright, Tom, 230, 259
- Xiaofei Tu, 34
- Xinhai Revolution (1911), 89, 111, 115, 295, 310n22
- Yamakawa Hitoshi, 205
- Yamamoto Kenzo, 204, 209–12, 215, 218

- Young Communist International (YCI), 318, 324, 327–8; Bolshevization goal, 320; language sections conflicts, 321–3
- Young Communist League (YCL), 184, 196; Agitation and Propaganda (Agit-Prop) Committees, 321, 324; Canadian nationhood and, 329–31; CPC relations, 317–19; French-Canadian members, 327–8, 331, 362; involvement in Spanish Civil War, 195; Jewish branch and other branches, 323–4, 332n3, 334n36; membership and language sections, 319–21, 323, 325, 332n3; national question and, 34–5; recruitment and education, 185–6, 188–94; trips to the Soviet Union, 187–8; Ukrainian Youth Section conflict, 321–2
- Young Pioneers, 184–5, 196, 318, 328, 332n3
- Zagh lul, Sa'd, 82
- Zetkin, Clara, 106
- Zinoviev, Grigory, 66, 118, 138, 232, 254; at Baku Congress, 68, 85–6, 107; review of Kautsky, 52–3
- Zumoff, Jacob, 19